SAPPHO & PHAON

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

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BY PERCY MACKAYE

The Canterbury Pilgrims. A Comedy.
Fenris, the Wolf. A Tragedy.
Jeanne D'Arc.
Sappho and Phaon.

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SAPPHO AND PHAON

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MADAME KALICH

As Sappho. Act 1.

SAPPHO AND PHAON

A Tragedy

SET FORTH WITH A PROLOGUE, INDUCTION, PRELUDE, INTERLUDES, AND EPILOGUE

BY
PERCY MACKAYE

New York
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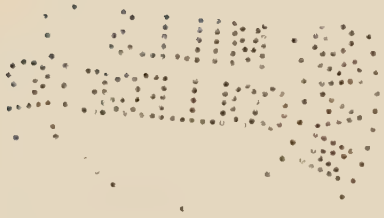

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TO MARION

σύν μοι πῖνε, συνήβα, συνέρα,
συστεφανηφόρει,
σύν μοι μαινομένῳ μαίνεο,
σύν σώφρονι σωφρόνει.

PREFATORY NOTE

As the manuscript of this play is in press, the report comes from Italy that the momentous project of Professor Charles Waldstein, of Cambridge, England, for the excavation of Herculaneum is once more — after some years of vicissitude — in suspense.

Whether that incomparable undertaking, mysterious with the promise of hidden beauty and human revelation, shall be destined to fulfilment, remains for the civilizations, and preëminently for the Italian government, to determine.

In so far as some of its potential aspects have been inspirational to the inductive portions of this play, the author desires to extend his grateful acknowledgments to Professor Waldstein for having provided him with frequent authentic information regarding the Herculaneum project, and to express his hope that the conception of that project — one of the noblest modern uses of the imagination — may yet attain to its legitimate aim and acclamation.

The writer wishes, also, to express his sincere appreciation to Professor Francis W. Kelsey, of the University of Michigan (translator of Mau's "Pompeii"), for criticism of archæological details in the Prologue and Induction; to Robert Eames Faulkner, of Keene, New Hampshire, for his fine instigations to the knowledge of those alluring *Sapphic Fragments*, which breathe to-day the passionate presence of Sappho herself; to Barry Faulkner, for the cover design of this volume.

The stage rights of the play, in America, are owned by Mr. Harrison Grey Fiske, for Madame Bertha Kalich.

P. M–K.

Cornish, New Hampshire,
March, 1907.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

I. Of the Prologue

*MEDBERY, *an American*
PIETRA DI SELVA, *an Italian*
DR. ZWEIFEL, *a German*
} *Archæologists engaged in the excavation at Herculaneum.*

ITALIAN LABOURERS.

II. Of the Induction

*ACTIUS, *a Pompeian player* (*enacting* Phaon *in the Tragedy*).

SOREX, *a pantomimist, from Pompeii* (*enacting* Hercules *in the Interludes of the Tragedy*).

HERACLIUS, *training-master* (Choregus) *of the players, mimes, and pantomimists at Varius' private theatre in Herculaneum.*

VARIUS, *the Roman dramatic poet, author* (*suppositionally*) *of the Tragedy.*

Q. HORATIUS FLACCUS (Horace), *the Roman Satirist.*

P. VERGILIUS MARO (Virgil), *the poet of the* Georgics *and* Eclogues.

*NÆVOLEIA, *a mime* (*enacting* Sappho *in the Tragedy*).

III. Of the Prelude

PROLOGUS (*announcing Varius' Tragedy before the Herculaneum curtain*).

Varius, Horace, Virgil, Mæcenas, Pollio, Guests of Varius, Citizens of Herculaneum (*all as mutes*).

IV. Of the Tragedy

(Conceived as being performed on the stage of Varius' theatre.)

*PHAON, *a public slave and fisherman of Mitylene in Lesbos.*
ALCÆUS, *the Greek lyric poet, a noble of Mitylene.*
PITTACUS, *tyrant of Mitylene.*
BION, *a child.*
PRIEST OF POSEIDON (*mute*).
*SAPPHO, *the Lesbian poetess.*
ANACTORIA, *one of her girl-disciples.*
ATTHIS, *another.*
THALASSA, *a slave woman of the sea-beach.*

V. Of the Interludes

See Appendix.

VI. Of the Epilogue

*MEDBERY.
THE ITALIAN LABOURERS.

* Medbery, Actius, and Phaon are impersonated by one and the same modern actor; Nævoleia and Sappho, by one and the same modern actress.

TIME AND PLACE OF ACTION

OF THE PROLOGUE: *The near (?) future. — A subterranean excavation, beneath the modern Italian town of Resina, the ancient site of Herculaneum. The scene represents a shallow, semi-ruinous chamber, anciently used as the Players' Quarters (behind the stage wall) of the private theatre of Varius, in Herculaneum.*

OF THE INDUCTION: *About B.C. 25. — The same spot, in its state of original use and adornment.*

OF THE PRELUDE AND INTERLUDES: *About B.C. 25. — The forestage or orchestra, in front of the closed curtain of Varius' theatre.*

OF THE TRAGEDY (conceived as being enacted B.C. 25, on the stage of Varius' theatre): *About 600 B.C. — The scene, which remains the same throughout, represents a high promontory, overlooking the Ægean Sea, near Mitylene in Lesbos; the temple of Aphrodite and Poseidon, exterior.*

ACT I. — *A day in Spring; late afternoon and sunset.*

ACT II. — *The moonlit night of the same.*

ACT III. — *The next morning; earliest dawn until sunrise.*

OF THE EPILOGUE: *The same scene as the Prologue; one hour later.*

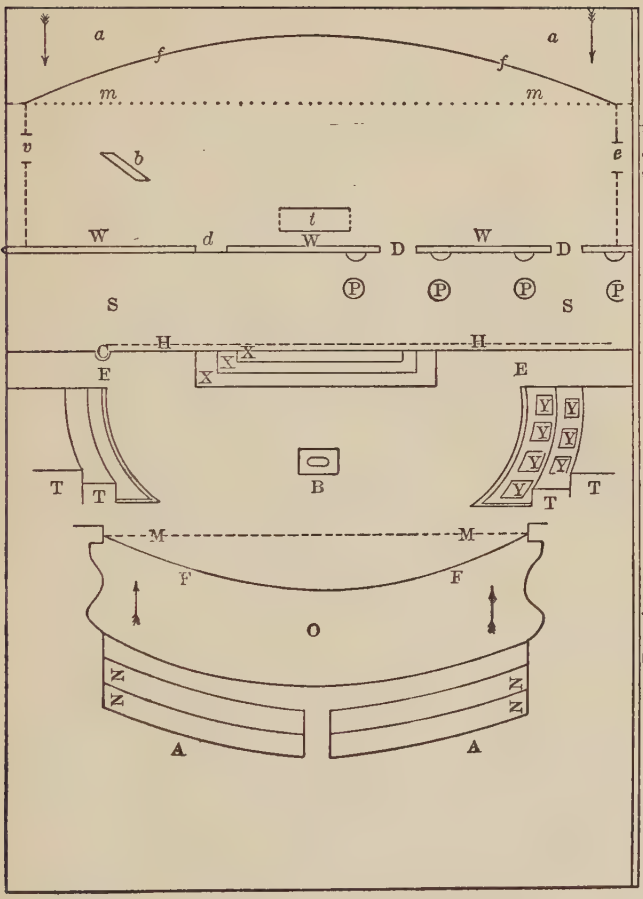
EXPLANATION OF DIAGRAM

INDUCTION SCENE (*Projected*)

a Modern audience.
b Bronze bench (from which Horace, Virgil, and Varius watch rehearsal of the Tragedy).
d Door, blocked by back of ancient scenery (viz.: the painted drop depicting the Ægean Sea).
e Exit to dressing rooms of ancient players.
f Footlights of modern theatre.
m Modern curtain.
t Table of stone (at which Actius makes up as Phaon).
v Door to passageway leading to the villa of Varius.
w Dividing wall between Herculaneum stage and players' quarters.

GROUND PLAN OF TRAGEDY

A Modern audience.
B Marble altar and base.
C Caryatid of bronze (defining proscenium opening of Herculaneum Stage).
D Door of temple.
E Exit aisle.
F Footlights of modern theatre.
H Herculaneum curtain (disappearing through slit in floor of ancient stage).
M Modern curtain.
O Orchestra of modern theatre.
P Pillar of colonnade in front of temple.
S Stage of Herculaneum theatre.
T Tier of seats in Herculaneum theatre.
X Steps ascending to ancient stage from Herculaneum orchestra space.
Y Separate seat of sculptured marble.
Z Row of seats in modern theatre.



GROUND PLAN OF TRAGEDY

WITH IMAGINARY PROJECTION OF INDUCTION SCENE.

Ex noto fictum carmen sequar, ut sibi quivis
speret idem, sudet multum frustraque laboret
ausus idem.

— HORACE: *De Arte Poetica.*

THE PROLOGUE

"Tutt' altro ciel mi chiama,
Addio, Addio!"

THE PROLOGUE

Before the curtain rises, voices of men are heard singing in harmony. During their song the scene is disclosed, revealing a subterranean excavation, in the left portion of which Labourers, with picks and mattocks, are digging, slowly and carefully, the blackish earth. In the obscurity of the right exit, stands a mule with a drag-cart, into which the workmen, from time to time, shovel the sifted tufa-dust and débris.

By the light of electric torches, the place is seen to be a shallow, oblong room, the semi-ruinous walls of which are painted, in Pompeian style and colouring, with dim-hued frescoes.[1]

At the back of the scene are three door-spaces; the two at left and right are boarded up with new timbers; the one at the centre is closed by a gate of iron-grating, through which — in the darkness beyond — are barely visible Roman pillars and, behind those, what appear to be the circle-formed tiers of stone seats.

[1] NOTE. — Of these frescoes the centre one depicts several figures in players' masks — evidently a mythological scene from Old Roman Comedy, wherein a grotesque, bearded demigod, in woman's chlamys, seated with a spindle, is spinning wool, while a nymph, garbed in a lion's skin, bends beside him, with her attendant nymphs grouped about her. From a green coppice near by a satyr looks on, grinning slyly, surrounded by fauns with sylvan pipes.

In the right and the left wall, respectively, is a door-space, but of that on the left only the upper portion is visible above the mound of earth which the workmen are digging out; that on the right is partly concealed by a pillar of tufa (rising to the ceiling) which, on that side, frames the scene, thereby causing it to be several feet narrower than the actual proscenium-opening of the modern theatre. The ceiling consists also of vaulted tufa.

Near the back wall, centre, is a stone table with sculptured front solid to the ground. Beside this, half reclined with his elbows upon it, bending near his torch over a papyrus scroll, is a young man, in a workman's blouse. His eager face, bare save for a light moustache, is intent upon the partly unwound papyrus before him.

At the left, among the excavators, overseeing their digging, stands a man with dark hair and moustache, evidently an Italian. Near him stands a short, stout, bearded man with eye-glasses, clothed in an ill-fitting frock coat. He also watches the workmen narrowly as they pick, sift, and shovel the hard black soil.

THE LABOURERS

[*As they work, singing to the popular melody.*]

"Addio mia bella Napoli,
Addio, addio!
La tua soave immagine
Chi mai, chi mai scordar potrà!

"Del ciel l' azzurro fulgido,
La placida marina,
Qual core non inebbria,
Non bea, non bea di voluttà!

"In tela terra e l' aura
Favellano d' amore;
Te sola al mio dolore
Conforto io sognerò. — Oh!

"Addio mia bella Napoli,
Addio, addio!
Addio care memorie
Del tempo ah! che passò!

"Tutt' altro ciel mi chiama — "

THE ITALIAN

[*Raising his hand, stops them in their song.*]

Basta!

[*Signing to the head-workman to pass him an object which the latter has just dug out, he takes it in his hand and examines it, then passes it to the man in the frock coat. At the ceasing of the song, the younger man in the blouse has glanced up from the table, and now, starting to his feet, speaks to him of the frock coat.*]

THE MAN IN THE BLOUSE

What's your new find, Zweifel?

ZWEIFEL

A bronze box.

THE MAN IN THE BLOUSE

[*Coming over to him.*]

What is it?

ZWEIFEL

If you mean by that, Medbery, what was its use in ancient Herculaneum, that remains to be determined later —

[*Handing him the box gingerly, with a wry look over his eye-glasses.*]

scientifically, not poetically!

MEDBERY

You forget, Doctor, that this science of ours *is* poetry.

[*Taking the box to the table, he opens it with care, the Italian looking over his shoulder.*]

Small ivory compartments; here are vials; dust of different colours; is this chalk, di Selva?

DI SELVA

[*Examining the dust.*]

It may once have been paint.

MEDBERY

[*Eagerly.*]

Paint! Let me look again.

[*Di Selva is called aside by the head-workman, whom he confers with and quietly directs concerning the work of the labourers. Medbery continues speaking half to himself, half to Zweifel.*]

Here are hairs — crumbling already in the air; these carved handles must have been brushes. And what are these letters on the lid? Great Scott! this proves it all. Do you know what this was, Doctor?

ZWEIFEL

I see it *is* — a box.

MEDBERY

I see it *was* — a make-up box.

ZWEIFEL

A what?

MEDBERY

A box for holding the make-up paints of an ancient Roman actor — one of those players who used this place where we are as a dressing-room for their performances on the stage yonder.

ZWEIFEL

As usual, my young friend, jumping at conclusions and landing in premises! Evidence, sir; what's your proof?

MEDBERY

Well, let me sum it up a little. We have now tunnelled into these bowels of Vesuvius for several thousand metres; last month we finished excavating the interior of the theatre there — the *cavea*, the orchestra, and the stage. We discovered that it was built originally with a roof, though evidently that was destroyed by the earthquake of '63, previous to the final eruption that covered Herculaneum.

ZWEIFEL

I am in no need of a Baedeker, sir. Your proofs!

MEDBERY

Pardon me. To-day we are just completing the excavation of this apartment behind the stage-wall. We have made here many pertinent findings — this charred mask, for instance; that bronze hand-mirror, now crusted over; those spears, evidently for stage use as properties; all prove, it would seem, that we are standing in what was once the Players' Quarters of this ancient theatre.

ZWEIFEL

Perhaps. [*Pointing right.*] That doorway also leads to more such rooms.

MEDBERY

Doubtless for the mimes and pantomimists.

ZWEIFEL

[*Shrugging.*]

"Doubtless" — what a word! Well?

MEDBERY

Well, Zweifel [*pointing left*], *that* doorway, which we are just unearthing there, opens, as you know, into a marble passage, leading about thirty yards northeast into the dining-room of a palatial villa. That villa, by the inscriptions there, was once the seaside winter residence of Varius, the dramatic poet of Rome, in the reign of Augustus Cæsar.

ZWEIFEL

Please! I am not a tourist. What has all this to do with our bronze box?

MEDBERY

[*Pointing to the lid.*]

Do you see those letters raised in the metal?

ZWEIFEL

[*Reading.*]

C. U. A. A. — Well?

MEDBERY

C. Ummidius Actius Anicetus.

ZWEIFEL

What, the actor whose name is scratched on the walls in Pompeii?

MEDBERY

Known as Actius. He was popular there, as you know. But he acted also at Herculaneum; he made up his face two thousand years ago here in this room, with paint from this box.

ZWEIFEL

[*With irritation.*]

Are you an archæologist, or an actor yourself? When and where did you get this specific knowledge?

MEDBERY

Last night [*tapping his papyrus scroll*], from this. I sat up till daylight deciphering these few lines of it.

ZWEIFEL

Ah! One of the manuscripts we discovered in the library of the villa.

MEDBERY

It is, as you see, charred by the tufa, and ticklish to unwind without breaking; but look here for my pains. May I translate to you this bit I've unwound?

ZWEIFEL

[*Stolidly.*]

I should be interested.

MEDBERY

Listen, then [*reading from the scroll*]: "Here is written a Tragedy called *Sappho and Phaon*, conceived in verse by Varius the poet. It was first performed on the eve of the vernal equinox, in the ninth consulship of Cæsar Augustus" —

ZWEIFEL

B.C. 25.

MEDBERY

[*Continuing.*]

— "being enacted upon the stage of the aforesaid Varius's private theatre in Herculaneum, in the presence of P. Vergilius Maro and Q. Horatius Flaccus, poets"—

DI SELVA

[*Who has approached and listened.*]

Virgil and Horace!

MEDBERY

[*Continuing.*]

— "and other illustrious guests, his friends, from Rome and elsewhere."

ZWEIFEL

[*Fidgeting.*]

Very interesting; but what of this Actius —

MEDBERY

So much, you see, is written by the scribe. Now follows a note by a different hand in the margin. [*Reading.*] "On the above occasion, the parts of Sappho and of Phaon were enacted, respectively, by Nævoleia, the mime, and C. Ummidius Actius Anicetus, the popular player, who consented to come from Pompeii to act with her, because he loved the wench. These players, in their disguises, used not masks but face-paint, after the early fashion of the renowned Roscius; but customary masks were used in the pantomine *Hercules and the Sphynx*, which was enacted in the Interludes by Sorex, the pantomimist. The Tragedy was well received by friendly auditors, but has seldom been repeated before the multitude, the poet having taken certain liberties with his theme and verse unfamiliar to this time and people. The present manuscript was used as a prompter's copy, and is the property of me, Heraclius, Choregus of the private players of Varius, my master."

DI SELVA

[*Seizing Medbery's hand.*]

My boy, I congratulate you. A rare find!

MEDBERY

I think so. What do you say, Zweifel?

ZWEIFEL

We must be very cautious, young man. In the first place, perhaps your translation — excuse me! — may be flavoured a little with your favourite extract — imagination.

MEDBERY

[*Glancing at di Selva.*]

Thank you.

ZWEIFEL

In the second place, it is very doubtful if we should put trust in an authority so manifestly at variance with the accepted facts of ancient histrionic art. How, for example, if your player Actius, in defiance of tradition, had used face-paint from this box — how do you explain the existence here of this actor's mask?

[*Zweifel points to the charred mask.*]

MEDBERY

[*Lifting it.*]

Why, you see for yourself; this doubtless was Hercules in the pantomime here referred to.

ZWEIFEL

[*Puckering his mouth.*]

"Doubtless!" It is always "doubtless" — except to scientists. In the next place, sir, how are we to account for the lapse of time between the date of this manuscript and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79?

Furthermore, as to this illustrious audience of yours, — these poets — these Virgils and Horaces — I must first see with my eyes —

[*He reaches for the manuscript; but Medbery, retaining it, raises his hand mysteriously, as in warning.*]

MEDBERY

Hush!

ZWEIFEL

Sir?

MEDBERY

Hark, Herr Doctor!

[*A few of the workmen, now just departing with their torches — leading with them the mule and the drag-cart — leave the scene more dim. At the same time, a faint rumbling sound, echoing through the excavation, grows ever perceptibly louder.*]

Do you not hear?

ZWEIFEL

Hear what?

MEDBERY

[*With a swift smile toward di Selva.*]

Ah, Zweifel, we must be cautious — very cautious — in these excavations. We must not offend this antique world.

ZWEIFEL

Offend what?

MEDBERY

We must not forget the prerogatives of these ancient citizens in their Limbo; their shades flitted to and fro in the dimness forever; they never died.

ZWEIFEL

What the devil do you mean?

MEDBERY

Mean?

[*Tiptoeing to the iron grating and opening it, he peers into the dark theatre, while the rumbling sound increases to a hollow, murmurous thunder.*]

Listen again! This lost world under the lava — 'tis not like ours up there in the daylight. Here in the dark, these Herculaneans — they have had no need of eye-glasses, nay, for twice these thousand years. And if we hunt them only with our eyes we shall never quarry them. Yet if we doubt them they will only mock us the more, — like that! Herr Doctor! do you hear them now? *They* have heard you — those departed poets, those Horaces and Virgils, those Mæcenases and Pollios, those dead illustrious guests of Varius! Hark, they are mocking you, Doctor! They are mocking, for look there in the dark: they have risen in their seats — that ancient audience; they are applauding their poet's play — *Sappho and Phaon;* they are rolling their applause over your head, Herr Zweifel, in thunder and in ashes — ashes of reprehension!

ZWEIFEL

[*Exasperated.*]

Ashes of stratification! Very true, young man. Your nerves are deranged by insomnia. That rumbling is the noise of carriage wheels on the road

to Resina above us — precisely twenty-two and a half metres up there in a plumb line through the tufa bed — which reminds me that I ordered a carriage for Naples at noon. [*Taking out his watch.*] Twelve o'clock — just; and lunch-time. — Are you coming, gentlemen?

DI SELVA

In a moment. I'll bring the men along for their hour of sunshine.

ZWEIFEL

[*To Medbery.*]

By the way, my Romanticist, I am going to the theatre to-night in Naples to see young Salvini in *Œdipus*. Will you come in my carriage and join me?

MEDBERY

Many thanks, Doctor, but you see I am just now allured by an older player of tragedy — this Actius, whose rôle was Phaon.

ZWEIFEL

May you enjoy him — in papyrus, sir. I advise you to join his profession.

MEDBERY

[*Abstractedly.*]

His profession was not as honoured in Herculaneum as Salvini's is in Naples.

ZWEIFEL

[*Lighting a cigar, departs, speaking to di Selva as he goes.*]

Don't forget to lock the gates; we must keep out the thieves and Cook's tourists.

[*Exit, right.*]

DI SELVA

[*Locking the grated iron gate.*]

This find of yours will arouse great interest, Medbery.

MEDBERY

I believe so, but it is all thanks to you, my dear di Selva; thanks, too, to your King of Italy, who has had the greatness of initiative to gather all the modern civilizations of the world harmoniously to this aspiring task: the excavation of Herculaneum. I remember well, some years ago, — it was about 1906 or '07 — how deeply you were discouraged. You had laid your electrifying plan before the heads of the Nations — to restore together their common heritage; they responded generously, but soon delay and complication and controversy set in darkly. The people were apathetic — blindfold. Apathetic, good God! Here was one spot — one only in all the soil of Europe — where the Goth had never pillaged, the Saracen had never burned, the insensate Christian centuries had never ravaged — the art, the loveliness, the knowledge of the ancient world. And this one spot was saved from these ravages of man by Nature herself — saved by fire, by the cataclysm of Vesuvius. Two thou-

sand years in lava and oblivion! and you said to the Nations, Look! — Hellas, Alexandria, Rome, the Augustan Age, they are not burned, not crumbled; their marbles, their pillars, their papyri, exist now and here, they are yours to-day — *yours*, and for what? Why, for a pick and a shovel and a penny and a heart of desire from every man of you. — Apathetic! Why, where was even a drunken miner buried alive in the earth by a crumbled shaft, but his fellows and townsmen would dig for him — dig till they fell from the foul gases a mile underground; and will not *man* — all the nations of mankind — dig a hundred feet to restore the sun to Sophocles and Sappho and Menander?

Ah, yes, but they will, — they *have*, thank God! Man has heard at last their muffled cry through the lava — their prayer to live again! And we are here now, because of you, my friend. And this scroll is but one, the poor first of a thousand others, whose titles you and I have seen, and whose words shall sound among the nations within the year. And that Apollo of Praxiteles, which we dug out last week, stands sunlit now in the Naples Museum, because long since you dreamed of him in darkness — the god in the pumice stone.

DI SELVA

[*To Medbery, who has taken his hands and pressed them.*]

It is pleasant, my friend, to see our dreams come true. But now the men need their lunch. Are you coming?

MEDBERY

No. [*Unwinds the papyrus scroll.*] I will stay here [*smiling*] — and lunch with Nævoleia.

DI SELVA

Well, we'll return in an hour.

[*Laughing back as he goes.*]

Good appetite! *Addio!*

[*Exit at right. The Labourers, having taken up their lunch-pails, follow him, resuming their singing, which grows fainter and dies away through the excavations.*]

THE LABOURERS

Di bacie d'armonia
È l' aura tua ripiena,
O magica Sirena
Fedel, fedele a te sarò!

Al mio pensier più teneri
Ritornano gl' instanti
Le gioje e le memorie
Di miei felici dì — oh!

Addio, mia bella Napoli,
Addio, addio!
Addio care memorie
Del tempo ah! che fuggì!

MEDBERY

[*Stands alone in the dimness — his one torch still gleaming by the table.*]

I wonder was she pretty — "Nævoleia, the mime!" Yes, yes, I can see her: there she stood and looked — a little wickedly? — at Actius here: Actius [*glancing at his scroll*] "who consented to come from Pompeii to act with her, because he loved the wench." The wench, *puellulam*, dubious word for a lady! But then the player folk were outcasts — despicable in the world's eye: poor vermin! And still they loved, like us; laughed — like us; and died — all poor vermin!

[*Going slowly to the table, lays down the scroll, and gazes at the bronze box.*]

Iteration — reiteration! — how this underworld re-echoes the word, forever! Exit; enter; *exeunt omnes* — forever.

[*Sitting behind the table and the broad mirror, crusted with verdigris, he toys with the ancient brushes.*]

Actius, you sat here; your eyes looked out of that mirror; this dust was your paint. You dipped your brush there — so fashion; touched your face — was it so, like that? No, this art was a bit strange to you. Sorex, your friend in the next room, perhaps he could help you. Why not? "Sorex!" you called, "come help me." What was that? The girl-mimes were laughing? He couldn't have heard you? Nay, call him louder, then![1]

[*End of the Prologue.*]

[1] Here, without pausing, the modern actor, who plays Medbery, continues to speak the words of the Induction.

THE INDUCTION

Animæ quales neque candidiores
Terra tulit, neque queis me sit devinctior alter.

HORACE: *Sat.* V; Bk. I.

Odi profanum vulgus et arceo.

HORACE: *Ode* I; Bk. III.

Acti, amor populi, cito redi.

Inscription on a Pompeian Wall.

THE INDUCTION

[*From the right is heard soft laughter.*]

Sorex! Hai, Sorex, there! My wick
Is low. Fetch here another light
And hurry up. I'm late; the play
Will soon begin. You louse, I say!
Quit pinching of the girls and help
Me paint my face.

[*From the door on the right there enters — carrying a hand lamp — an antique figure, whose head and face are concealed by a grotesque bearded mask. The lamp, illumining the scene, reveals the same room as that of the Prologue, now perfectly renovated, devoid of tufa or sign of ruin, its wall-frescoes undimmed, its furnishings freshly bright. Various belongings of actors and stage properties are hung, or scattered about. Partly concealed behind the stone table and the hand mirror (in the spot where Medbery before was sitting) sits a man in Roman garb. Him the entering figure in the mask addresses with a kind of salaam.*]

THE MASKED ONE

Great Actius'
Obedient insect!

ACTIUS

[*Looking up, reveals a smooth-shaven face partly made up.*]

What's the mask?

THE MASKED ONE

I'm Hercules, in the pantomime
We play to-night.

ACTIUS

I envy you.
By Cæsar, this new-fangled art
Of painting your own skin — 'tis one
Too fine for me. — Look at my face.
How goes it now?

THE MASKED ONE

You're exquisite.

ACTIUS

You're impudent! — They tell me, though,
Roscius himself did often act
Without a mask.

THE MASKED ONE

[*Hovering round him, begins to take the brushes and touch his face.*]

Who told you so?

ACTIUS

Our poet, the lord Varius,
Who wrote the tragedy, in which
I play this rôle of Phaon. Well,
He ought to know; the emperor
Paid him a million sesterces
For his last play. I would I had
A thousand of 'em!

THE MASKED ONE

What would you
Buy with 'em?

ACTIUS

Buy! Hark, Sorex; keep
This in your mask; I'd buy back what
I've lost — a wench. I am in love.

THE MASKED ONE

[*Titters.*]

In love! — with whom?

ACTIUS

With Nævoleia,
That plays the part of Sappho to
My Phaon. 'Tis the sweetest wench,
The vilest slut, the dearest drab,
The loveliest mercenary minx
In Herculaneum. — Look out!
What are you doing?

THE MASKED ONE

Lift your chin;

I'll finish you.

[*Turning him to the mirror, the Masked One plies the paint and brushes, and proceeds — without his perceiving it — to make up his face in the most grotesque lines and colours.*]

ACTIUS

[*Lifting from the table some tiny figures of bronze.*]

Now swear me, up
And down, and blue and black, upon
These Lares and Penates, not
To whisper what I say to her
Or any breathing soul.

THE MASKED ONE

[*Touching the bronze figures.*]

'Tis sworn!

ACTIUS

Friend Sorex, Nævoleia has
Deceived me. Ten denarii
Per day she has received from me
This seven months and been content,
And hung upon my eyes with love,
And I have worshipped her. By Styx!
Now comes along this Myrmillo,
The gladiator—he that made
Such big noise in the amphitheatre
Killing your Pugnax — well, he offers

A twenty to my ten, and she
Takes him, and fools me. — Jove! She thinks
I do not know it. But to-day
I wrote a note, signed Myrmillo,
Asking a tryst; and, as you know,
She sent an answer, by that note
Which you did bring to me instead
Of Myrmillo. The answer said
She'd come to-night. — Ha! have a care,
You pinched me! — I will show the wench
She shall not make me ludicrous
To my own face.

THE MASKED ONE

[*Whirling him round, thrusts his painted face against the mirror.*]

Look at it, then!

[*Running toward the door, right, the Masked One is pursued by Actius, who catches up a lyre that lies near.*]

ACTIUS

[*Striking with it.*]

You dog of Hades —

[*The other, removing the mask of Hercules, turns and reveals to Actius the face of a girl laughing at him.*]

Nævoleia!

NÆVOLEIA

Well, love, how do you like yourself?

ACTIUS

[*Rubbing the paint off with his garment.*]

I swear —

NÆVOLEIA

Nay, Acti, keep your face ;
Don't let it fall ; it makes a lovely
Fool.

ACTIUS

But you changed your voice !

NÆVOLEIA

Let's hope
I am an artist, though I be
A mercenary slut.

ACTIUS

Sweet love,
You have not heard yet —

NÆVOLEIA

How you forged
A note, signed Myrmillo !

ACTIUS

But you
Replied to it.

NÆVOLEIA

O hypocrite !

ACTIUS

Nay, Sorex brought your answer.

NÆVOLEIA

Worse
Than worst! — To steal a note, and then
Upbraid me for your robbery!

ACTIUS

But Nævoleia —

NÆVOLEIA

[*Raging, thrusts the mask of Hercules into the hands of Actius* (*now bewildered*).]

Sorex! Sorex!

[*Enter, right,* SOREX, *carrying several masks of comedy. Nævoleia rushes to him.*]

Take me away from him.

SOREX

What's up?
I'm hunting for my mask.

NÆVOLEIA

[*Pointing at Actius.*]

'Tis there.

[*Crying on Sorex's shoulder.*]

O save me from his slander!

SOREX

Wench,
That's right, wench; weep thy heart on me.
I'd rather feel thy tears than take
A shower in the tepidarium.

NÆVOLEIA

[*Turning upon Actius.*]

Reviler! forger! — Tell him, darling
Sorex, what 'tis to be a loyal
Lover!

SOREX

Nay, he's no gentleman
That is no lover. Look at me:
In all Pompeii, where I was born,
Lives not another lover, with
A score like mine for loyalty.
Offhand, 'twixt my two thumbs, I'll name ye
A dozen wenches, who will be
My witnesses, how I to each
Have been a gentleman — that is,
Within the meaning of the word.
There's Januaria, Vitalis,
Doris, Lalage, Damalis,
Amaryllis, Florentina,
Hecla, Romula, Quieta —

ACTIUS

[*Stopping his mouth with his hand.*]

Shut up thy brothel, fool!

SOREX

[*Escaping, squares at him.*]

By Venus,
Come call me fool in the forum!

[*Nævoleia, drawing back, points to the door, left, — the same which in the Prologue was partly concealed and blocked by tufa, — where* HERACLIUS *has just entered.*]

NÆVOLEIA

Hush!

HERACLIUS

[*Raising his staff toward them.*]

Players!

SOREX

[*Ducking behind Nævoleia.*]

Lay low! Here's the Choregus.

HERACLIUS

[*Approaches, threatening to strike.*]

Less noise! — Your master Varius
Has heard you in the villa. He
Is risen from the dining couch,
And now is bringing here his guests
To show them through his theatre.

ACTIUS

And has our master guests?

HERACLIUS

'Tis well
For you to know it. Play your best
To-night. He hath from Rome invited
Horatius, the satirist,
And from Neapolis another
Poet, Virgilius — both friends
Of his and Cæsar's. They are come
To criticise his play, this first

Performance. In the audience
There will be other guests — the great
Mæcenas, and the tragicist
Lord Pollio, and many friends
From Herculaneum, Pompeii,
And Baiæ. — Look you know your lines.

[*Handing Actius a scroll — the same as that in the Prologue.*]

Here is the prompter's manuscript;
Glance over it again.

[*To Sorex, indicating the masks which Nævoleia is amusing herself by trying on.*]

These masks
Are ready for the pantomime?

SOREX

[*Showing them severally.*]

I wear these two, my master. This
Is Hercules Dejected, when
I sit a-spinning lamb's wool; that
Is Hercules Triumphant, where
I go to woo the Sphinx; this coy
Maiden is Omphale, and this
Her man-slave, Servus; this one here
Is old Silenus — would I had
A face like that!

HERACLIUS

Where are the fauns?
All dressed?

SOREX

[*Whistles.*]

The mimes are here, sir.

[*As he whistles a second time, there storm in from the right a troupe of mimes, garbed as fauns, in various stages of dress and make-up. Heraclius checks them.*]

HERACLIUS

Back!

Not now! Go back.

[*The mimes, shoving and pulling one another in laughter, return through the door, which closes after them. At the same moment appear, in the left doorway,* VARIUS, HORACE, *and* VIRGIL. *Seeing these, Heraclius signs to Actius, Nævoleia, and Sorex to draw back — up scene, right.*]

Your masters! Quiet!

[*Himself stepping slightly forward, Heraclius bows low, and stands waiting deferentially. Horace enters, talking volubly. Both he and Varius, in their mutual chaffing, address their remarks to Virgil, who stands absent-mindedly between them.*]

HORACE

[*Saluting Varius with his gesture.*]

Hail to mine host Preceptor of
Gastronomy! — I say, my Virgil,
Let no man lightly claim the art
Of giving banquets, till he hath
Deduced the subtle theory
Of tastes.

VARIUS

[*Laughing.*]

Will nothing stop him?

HORACE

Lo!

With waxing moons the slippery shellfish
Waxes, but not in every sea
Alike. Peloris from the Lake
Lucrine is far more exquisite
Than Baian murex; at Circeii
Ripens the lush, lascivious oyster,
The urchin at Misenum; but
At proud Tarentum breeds the ample
Voluptuous scallop.

VARIUS

By the star
Of Julius! Must we stand this?

HORACE

If

Beneath a cloudless sky you set
Your Massic wine, the thickish motes
Will vanish on the breeze of night
And with them every heady fume,
But if 'tis strained through linen cloth,
Its flavour's lost forever! — He
Who mixes Surrentine with dregs
Of casks Falernian, may clear
The sediment with pigeon's eggs,
Whose sticky yolks, being heavier,

Fall to the bottom. O forget not
Your appetizers — Afric snails
And roasted shrimps with lettuce — shrimps
That swim upon the stomach —

VARIUS

This,
Mind you, is Horace — frugal Horace,
Who boasts he only chews a cud
Of sorrel on his Sabine farm.

HORACE

[*Smiling, nudges Varius.*]

He has not heard us.

[*Speaking suddenly and loud.*]

Virgil!

VIRGIL

[*Starting.*]

Ah?

HORACE

What's that you said?

VIRGIL

[*Speaks slowly and with a slight stutter.*]

I said — Did I
Say anything? I think the view
Behind your villa, Varius,
Is beautiful: Vesuvius
Raising its quiet dome of green
Above us in the blue; below us
The red roofs of Pompeii, and
The sea — a blazing shield.

HORACE

Ye Muses!
Send me a lung complaint and lack
Of appetite, so I may live
On scenery instead of shrimps,
Like this your virgin, Virgil!

[*Laughing, he embraces Virgil, while Varius, who has called Heraclius to him and spoken aside, now turns to Horace.*]

VARIUS

If
You'll deign to turn your thoughts from dinner
Upon my tragedy, I'd like
Your judgments on these rascals here
In a brief scene, before the play
Begins.

HORACE

What is the scene?

VARIUS

The one
I spoke to you about at dinner,
In the first act, where Sappho helps
Phaon to mend his net.

HORACE

This is
Your Phaon?

VARIUS

This is Actius,
The player.

HORACE

[*As Nævoleia approaches with Actius.*]

And your Sappho — what,
A woman?

VARIUS

Yes, she was a mime,
But showed such gifts as made me grant her
This trial. — Nay, I told you this
Would be a play with innovations! —
Shall they begin?

HORACE

Surely.

VIRGIL

I pray you.

[*On a bronze bench, left, Horace and Virgil seat themselves.*]

VARIUS

Imagine, then, a net suspended
Here, and the temple yonder.

[*Taking from Actius the scroll of papyrus.*]

Now;
The cue is: **"I will mend it." — "You!"**

[*Varius sits between the two poets, there watching with them the two players, who — changing now their mien and expression — assume their rôles of Sappho and Phaon.*]

NÆVOLEIA

[*As Sappho.*]

To mend is woman's task.

ACTIUS

[*As Phaon.*]

Are you a woman ?

NÆVOLEIA

Perhaps I am what women yearn to be —
Man.

ACTIUS

Did you grow here in the temple ?

NÆVOLEIA

Where
I grew, or in what garden by the spray
Or wave-lit cave my spirit's seed was sown,
Surely, 'tis thou who knowest: for methinks
Thou also grewest there.

ACTIUS

It may be so.

NÆVOLEIA

Stood we not then as now ? and raised as now
The net between us ?

ACTIUS

[*Strangely.*]

Somewhat I remember.

NÆVOLEIA

And even as now thine eyes shone through the meshes,
And mine in thine : was it not always so ?

ACTIUS

[*Relapsing to indifference, turns as to tie the strands of the imaginary net.*]

'Tis broken.

NÆVOLEIA

Ah, but shall be mended; I
Will tie the fibres.

HORACE

[*Interrupting.*]

One moment: Fellow, in what parts
Hast thou been wont to act?

ACTIUS

In all
That meet the people's favour.

HORACE

[*With a wry face.*]

Ha!
I feared as much; what parts, for instance?

ACTIUS

In comedy I've played Dossenus
The knave, Bucco the bumpkin, Maccus
The clown, and Pappus, the old dotard.
In tragedy, Orestes, Ajax,
Achilles, Agamemnon, Creon,
And Œdipus; besides, in plays
By Livius Andronicus, some
Odd score of parts —

HORACE

Too versatile
To please the Muse; for Tragedy,
Though she will mix with grinning satyrs,
Still does so with such sweet aloofness
As when an honest matron dances
To keep a festival. Play not
To please your people, but your poet.

VARIUS

[*Smiling.*]

Nay, Horace! If you'll let him please
Me, let him please the people.

HORACE

Fie
Upon you! Let us watch 'em farther.

NÆVOLEIA

[*To Actius, resuming her impersonation.*]

You are a boatman.

ACTIUS

Yes.

NÆVOLEIA

Go you alone upon the water?

ACTIUS

Yes.

NÆVOLEIA

When you are all alone, are you afraid?

ACTIUS

No.

NÆVOLEIA

Put you ever far to sea ?

ACTIUS

Sometimes.

NÆVOLEIA

And have you never rowed to the mainland ?

ACTIUS

Oft.

NÆVOLEIA

By tempest ?

ACTIUS

Once.

NÆVOLEIA

A storm at twilight ?

ACTIUS

Once.

NÆVOLEIA

Oh, is it true, then, what the sea-wives tell ?
Was she a goddess ?

ACTIUS

Long ago: 'twas long
Ago ! I was a boy, and that's all dark.

NÆVOLEIA

And have you never seen her since she sprang
Burning, upon the sands of Lydia ?

ACTIUS

[*Momentarily ardent.*]

Sometimes methought — I know not.

NÆVOLEIA

Still you dreamed

You saw.

ACTIUS

How knowest thou ?

NÆVOLEIA

Tell me your dreams.

ACTIUS

[*Rapt.*]

Oft ere the day, while all the slaves are sleeping,
I and my boat put out on the black water ;
Under us there and over us the stars sing
Songs of that silence.
Soon then the sullen, brazen-hornèd oxen
Rise in the east, and slowly with their wind-ploughs
Break in the acres of the broad Ægean
Furrows of fire.
So, many a time there, as I leaned to watch them
Yoked in their glory, sudden 'gainst the sunrise
Seemed that there stood a maiden — a bright shadow.

NÆVOLEIA

Ah ! You beheld her !

HORACE

[*Applauding with Virgil.*]

Well done and aptly! By Apollo,
My Varius, is not this strange
That player-vermin such as these,
Who live in tavern-holes and swill
Sour wine and soup of peas, and sit
Carousing with their harlots, should
Thus animate your poetry
With power and truth?

ACTIUS

[*Stepping forward.*]

Is that so strange?

HORACE

[*Turns to the others with a look of amused surprise.*]

What's this?

ACTIUS

Is it permitted, masters,
For vermin to discourse?

HORACE

[*Touching his forehead meaningly, glances with inquiry at Varius.*]

A crack?

VARIUS

[*Nodding, amused, at Horace, speaks genially to Actius.*]

Speak, rascal, what you will.

ACTIUS

My lord
Horatius has deemed it strange
That we, who live in tavern-holes
And swill sour wine, should still be artists,
With souls to imbue a poet's lines
With animate power. For this he has
Been gracious to applaud us, as
Good players. I would ask of him,
What *is* a player? Is he not
A man who imitates his kind,
That is — mankind? But what, my masters,
Is man?

HORACE

By Socrates! The rogue
Hath grazed in Athens, and been groomed
By schoolmasters.

ACTIUS

Man — is not *he*
An animal who imitates
Also his kind? Why, then, a player
Is man epitomized, an ape
Of glorious hypocrisy,
Magnificent, because alone
He shows the counterfeit his image,
The hypocrite — himself. No schism
Exists, my lord, between yourself
And me but this: you are by nature,
Skilless, what I am by vocation,
More perfected. — You patch, you bungle,

Where I excel. Horatius is
Your part upon life's play-bill, but
You blur with that, and imitate,
Most pitifully, twenty others
All in an hour. — My part to-night
Is Phaon, whom my master there
Conceived *in nubibus;* 'tis true
I too may botch and fail to draw
The finer shades, but when I do,
My art's at fault, not I; my aim
Is single and declared: to be
Phaon to-night, to-morrow Maccus
The clown, the next day Œdipus
The tyrant, but while each shall last,
To be at least an honest player
And live the part I play. — I beg
A moment still! You spoke just now
Of Athens and of schoolmasters,
The name of Socrates you made
An oath, as he had been a god
Like Cæsar, yet you — you that hold
In reverence these philosophers,
See how you scorn and satirize
Their temple of philosophy —
The Theatre.

HORACE

Scorn!

ACTIUS

Not your plays,
O poets! No, but us, that are

Your instruments of flesh and blood,
Us players, in whose living eyes
And limbs your wan scripts flush to life
And flash their passionate response
From the eyes of your breathing audience. —
My lord Horatius, let me
Reverse your question : Is not *this*
Strange — yea, too strange ! — that we who thus
Give radiant reality
To your pale visions, are ourselves
Despised, and by your cult cast off
In shame, to share our dogs of wine
With harlots, in a tavern-hole ?

HORACE

[*After a brief silence, rising.*]

Player, we have deserved this, yet
I'll hope you still may deem me more
A Roman than I seemed. My father
Was born a slave and earned his oats
At public auctions ;

[*Indicating Virgil.*]

his kept bees
In Mantua. I trust we all
Are Roman gentlemen — all four.

[*Horace, Virgil, and Varius, in turn, take Actius' hand, and press it cordially.*]

VIRGIL

The cocks will cackle at the swan
Until they see him swim — good friend.

ACTIUS

[*Deeply moved.*]

My masters, you have lifted up
My heart and stopped my tongue.

VARIUS

[*As music sounds from within.*]

The flutes!
Our friends are gathering in front
To see the play. Mæcenas there
'Waits us with Pollio. Come, lads,
And lacerate my tragedy.

HORACE

"Sappho and Phaon!" You have been
Bold in your subject — to portray
The eternal maiden and her lover.

VARIUS

The subject made me bold, to dare
What Sappho did herself aspire —
To make her love live on, and be
Perpetual as Spring, that comes
Newly to generations new.

[*Lifting, then laying the papyrus scroll on the table.*]

And if to-night these thoughts of mine,
Sculptured alive in Actius
And Nævoleia here, shall move
To pity spirits such as yours —
There's my ambition and reward.

VIRGIL

[*Opening a door — up, left — which discloses the back of a set scene on the stage of Varius' theatre.*]

Is this the way?

VARIUS

No; that door's blocked
By scenery.

[*Opening, at centre, another door which discloses a wide dark space — dimly lit.*]

This one will lead us
Through to the orchestra, across
The stage.

VIRGIL

[*Closing his door.*]

Who did your scenery?

HORACE

Our shepherd of the Eclogues still
Pipes of the scenery!

VARIUS

'Twas painted
For me by Auceps, a disciple
Of Tadius, the master. He
Has pictured the Ægean shore
At Lesbos with a brush not dipped,
Methinks, in common paint-pots.

[*Waving Horace and Virgil to precede him.*]

Pray!

[*Turning to the Choregus.*]

Look that your pantomimists be
Masked for the Interludes.

HORACE

[*Pausing in his departure, raises both hands in deprecation.*]

Dumb play
Between the acts of tragedy? —
Worse than a curtain-show at Rome

VARIUS

[*Smiling, waves him in.*]

Wait till you see before you scoff.
This way.

[*The door closes. Actius, still moved by his talk with the poets, having gone to the table, sits and begins to put on the light beard of Phaon, not noticing Sorex and Nævoleia, whom the Choregus, going out, has left behind him in the upper right corner. Nævoleia now, tiptoeing behind Actius, kisses him suddenly and runs away, right. Starting up, Actius looks after her passionately.*]

ACTIUS

Wilt thou forgive me, witch?

NÆVOLEIA

[*Throwing him kisses.*]

Forever and aye.

[*Turning to Sorex, snuggles close to him, and, glancing slyly back at Actius whispers, aside.*]

Sweet Hercules,
Where is the house of Myrmillo?

SOREX

[*Goes with Nævoleia, giggling as she winks at him.*]

What, wench? Nay, wench! — Ho, wench of Venus!

[*Exeunt. Actius sits again moodily and swiftly completes the make-up of his beard, as the laughter of players and girl mimes resounds from the room which Nævoleia and Sorex have just entered. Rising then with the manuscript, he lifts, from among other stage-properties near him, a spear and, holding it in one hand, walks twice back and forth, conning the manuscript of the play held in his other hand.*]

ACTIUS

[*To himself.*]

That passage in the second act!

[*The sounds of laughter are renewed, and Nævoleia's voice is heard above the others; but Actius does not now notice the sounds. Pausing in his motion, he lays down the spear and murmurs his part of Phaon aloud, gradually growing articulate.*]

Nevermore
Shall you be sovereign of your maiden will
Or single in your fate. Not here with priest
And song, but with a spear, you have betrothed me.

[*Raising the weapon above him, he smiles up at it — as the voice of Nævoleia, outside, sings to Sorex's laughter.*]

NÆVOLEIA

Januaria, Vitalis,
Doris, Lalage, Damalis —

ACTIUS

[*Oblivious.*]

O thou, my spear, thou singest in my hand.
Thou art my power and manhood. Face to face
Thou pittest me in combat with the gods,
And raising thee, my mind is raised up
Confronting heaven, till from those clouds of fire
This slavish world grows dim, and all that sways it —
The tyrant's hate, the galley-master's goad,
The sordid trader's dreams of avarice —
Dwindle to impotence. Thine is the war
Which shall not end with time — war with those gods
Which made men's misery.

THE VOICE OF NÆVOLEIA

[*Singing.*]

Amaryllis, Florentina,
Hecla, Romula, Quieta —

[*Actius — his spirit completely lost and merged in the part of Phaon — slowly lowers his spear as, to the laughter of the players within, the curtain falls.*]

[*End of the Induction.*]

THE PRELUDE

tu, quid ego et populus mecum desideret, audi.
si plausoris eges aulæa manentis et usque
sessuri, donec cantor 'vos plaudite' dicat,
ætatis cuiusque notandi sunt tibi mores,
mobilibusque decor naturis dandus et annis.

— HORACE: *De Arte Poetica.*

sic priscæ motumque et luxuriem addidit arti
tibicen traxitque vagus per pulpita vestem.

— *Idem.*

THE PRELUDE

To the music of flutes within, the modern curtain rises, disclosing to the spectator's view the interior of Varius' private theatre in Herculaneum — namely, that segment of it which includes the ancient stage, orchestra space [the outer curve of which coincides with the curve of the modern footlights], and the first four tiers of the *cavea*, or auditorium, — the said tiers being actually represented, on either side, only as far as the marble coping of a first aisle, which runs approximately parallel to the modern footlights and disappears behind the [modern] 'wings' [1] on either side.

On the left side, the tiers of this auditorium are provided with separate, sculptured seats of marble; on the right, however, the first tier consists of a curved marble bench,[2] the curve of which defines the edge of the orchestra space on that side.

Thus the modern audience is seated, as it were, within the omitted [but imagined] segment of Varius' Theatre, facing — together with the Herculanean audience — the ancient stage.

[1] These [modern] 'wings' depict, or suggest by the customary perspective of stage scenery, the interior constructive outlines of Varius' Theatre.

[2] This bench — since no Herculanean spectators are ever visible on the right side — is, later, used by the characters in the Tragedy.

This ancient stage consists of a shallow platform, raised about two feet above the orchestra space, and connected therewith by broad, wide steps of stone.

[At left and at right, in front of the stage, is an exit aisle.]

At the rise of the modern curtain, however, the ancient stage itself is not visible, being shut from view by the Herculaneum curtain.[1]

The Herculaneum curtain itself is painted to represent the street exterior of a house, in the Pompeian style. In the centre, set in a lintel frame, is depicted a wide, squat door, the stage platform forming its sill, to which the broad stone steps [aforesaid] lead up from the orchestra space.

Above the squat doorway is a window casement. Both door and window are not merely painted on the curtain, but are devised to open and close practically when needed.[2]

The top of the curtain is designed as an overjutting tiled roof.

Curtain and theatre are tinted and adorned with

[1] This, being constructed on the principle of all Roman theatre curtains, is not let down from above, but, fastened to a top rod, is drawn upward [by pulleys behind the scenes] through a narrow slit in the floor of the stage platform, close to its outer edge. Through this slit it stretches its expanse upward from the stage's edge to a height at which the curtain's top is just visible, and extends laterally, on the right, to a bronze caryatid [which forms the proscenium frame of the ancient stage on that side], and on the left disappears behind the [modern] 'wings.'

[2] In such case, when the door is open, a temporary back set-piece within — painted to represent a hallway — conceals from view the Herculaneum stage itself, with its [Greek scene] setting of the Tragedy.

the pseudo-Orient richness of the early Augustan age.

In the centre of the orchestra space, raised one step above its level, stands a low marble altar, sculptured with emblems of the sea. Upon this stands fixed a slim tripod of bronze.

Before this curtain, then, when the scene opens, are discovered groups of Herculanean citizens and guests of Varius, in festal Roman garments. Amongst them are Pollio and Mæcenas, the latter magnificently yet delicately wreathed and garbed.

To the piping of the two Flutists [who stand, at left and right, at the edge of the scene], all of these persons make their way, in laughter and conversation, from the right exit aisle across the orchestra space to the seats of the *cavea* on the left. Here, passing between the marble seats and mounting the tiers to their places, they disappear from view within the wings, whence their flickering shadows, cast down by torches above, and the humming sound of their conversation, give token of their presence in the theatre.

This humming sound is suddenly increased to a murmurous roar, upon the entrance — through the door in the curtain — of Varius, Horace, and Virgil.

These, as they descend the broad steps to the orchestra space, are hailed from the [hidden] tiers of the *cavea* by cries of "Varius! Horatius! Vergilius!" and greetings, blended and indistinguishable, in Latin.

Varius and the two poets return these greetings with smiles and gestures of friendship, and approach the first seats of the *cavea*. There, looking up,

Varius waves his hand, calls, "Mæcenas! Pollio!" enters the *cavea*, and, mounting with his companions, passes also to a tier beyond view.

At this moment, in the curtain-doorway, clad in simple Greek garment and wreath of gold, appears PROLOGUS, preceded by two slaves. To one of the slaves he hands a lighted taper, to the other a bronze disk with incense powder. Descending the steps with these, the slaves approach the altar, on the bronze tripod of which the one slave places his disk, and the other ignites the incense. Each then departs at either side aisle. Meantime, upon the entrance of Prologus, each of the Flutists — his flute discarded — gives blast to a mellow, antique horn, the sound whereof silences the Herculaneum audience. Simultaneously Prologus raises his arms, as in invocation, toward the pale blue wreaths of smoke that float upward from the tripod.

PROLOGUS

To Cæsar where he sits in Rome our Emperor,
Remembrance! and through him unto the mightier
gods
Be incense evermore! — The gods alone discern
What darkly man imagines; his pale future's dawn
And twilit past alike to them are noonday. We,
Therefore, who meet this hour, expectant to behold
Long-perished Sappho and her antique age awake
To life, ourselves are ancients of a time unborn,
Shadow-enactors of an audience of shades,
And as this little smoke of incense, so are we

On the altar of the immortals. — What are they? —
Ourselves
That were, ourselves that will be ever: Ancestry,
Posterity — *they* are the gods, of whom we are
Both seed and loins: one race, one lineage of love,
One continuity of passion and of pain;
And unto them this fleeting breath and smoke of us
Goes up in prayer. — *Vale!* Our tragedy begins;
And if the play shall please, — Shadows, applaud
yourselves!

[*Exit within the curtain-door, which closes.*]

Slowly then the curtain itself descends and disappears, disclosing the scene of the Tragedy.

[*End of the Prelude.*]

THE TRAGEDY

καὶ ποθήω καὶ μάομαι . . .
ἀλλὰ πᾶν τόλματον. . . .

— *Sapphonis Fragmenta.*

Βῆ δ' ἀκέων παρὰ θῖνα
πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης.

— *Iliad, I.*

ACT I

Scene: A high promontory, overlooking the Ægean sea, sprinkled with isles.

On the left, pillars of a Doric temple form a colonnade which, stretching away left, disappears behind tall cypresses. Behind these columns, tapestries of dark azure hide the whole wall of the temple, concealing the doorway. Against the background, the contours of the pillars themselves rise vast and chaste into the obscurity of foliage — their capitals lost among ancient boughs.

Near the centre of the scene, at back, against the side wall of the temple, built on a raised and jutting rock and approached by steps from the colonnade, stands an altar of yellow marble, in which is sculptured a flying dove.

Below this altar of Aphrodite, the foreground on the right juts upward to it in contours of the bare, weathered rock of the promontory; in this, a worn crevice, near the centre of the scene, indicates the beginning of a sheer cliff-path, which descends the precipice to the unseen beach, the far sound of whose breakers, in ceaseless cadence, rising murmurous from below, catches the ear in pauses of the action. Near the cliff-path, a fire-urn, upheld by sculptured Nereids. On the right, the seascape is defined by a grove of olive trees, which grow near to the foreground.

On the edge of this grove, chiselled in colossal proportions out of yellow marble, rises a statue of Aphrodite, conceived with the naïve, pre-classic simplicity of an age still half Homeric.

Similarly, on the left, a statue of Poseidon. These images do not obtrude themselves, but partly withdrawn in foliage, their large presences overshadow in silence the action of the Tragedy.

As this scene is disclosed to view, voices of women are heard singing in unison within the temple.

THE VOICES

Builders, build the roof-beam high:
Hymenæon!
More than mortal comes the man;
Hymenæon!
But the maiden like a maid,
Rose-pale, rose-red,
Kala, O Chariessa!

[*From the temple appears* ANACTORIA. *She looks away, right, then turning to depart, left, encounters* ATTHIS *entering.*]

ANACTORIA

So late?

ATTHIS

O Anactoria!

ANACTORIA

Our lady
Sappho hath bade me look for thee. — Not weeping!

ATTHIS

He hath not come! My eyes are water-blind
With staring on the sea, in hopes to espy
His scarlet sail slope from the mainland. Still
No sign — no little gleam — of Larichus.

ANACTORIA

Thou happy Atthis!

ATTHIS

Happy? But to-morrow —

ANACTORIA

To-morrow you shall wed with Sappho's brother,
And win for sister the bright Lesbian Muse,
Who hath herself composed your bridal-hymn,
And he that is Poseidon's cup-bearer
Shall be your husband.

ATTHIS

Shall I not, then, weep
Because he does not come? Three days ago
He sailed for Lydia, to fetch me home
Pearls for our bridal. Oh, I want not pearls,
Nor any gift but Larichus, his love.

ANACTORIA

Why, he will come. To-night the moon is full,
The Ægean calm. — What's this?

ATTHIS

I had forgot.
As I climbed up from Mitylene here,
I met Alcæus, and he gave me this
To bring —

ANACTORIA

Alcæus? Give it me!

[*She snatches a vase from Atthis.*]

Dear gods,
Let not this trembling quake the promontory
And topple temple and all into the waves.
Daylight and dark! — *Alcæus* sends me this.

ATTHIS

[*Gazes away, sighing.*]

O little clouds, why are ye shaped like sails?

ANACTORIA

Fresh from his hands — himself the potter! Here's
A painted vine, and under the ripe grapes
A dove hath wove her nest among the verses.
Verses and vase — poem and painter — mine!

[*She kisses the verse and reads.*]

'The sea-god breathes his heart in the sea-shell,
And leaves it on the sands, to syllable
One sound forever.
O maid of Lesbos, murmuring one name
Within this vase, thy lover's lips have vowed
Passion eternal.'

[*With sudden abandon, she springs to Atthis and embraces her.*]

My Atthis, thou hast brought to me in this
More precious medicine than ever healed
Fever and ague.

ATTHIS

I?

ANACTORIA

You do not guess;
Of late I have been damned with jealousy
That almost made me hate him.

ATTHIS

[*Appalled.*]

Larichus?

ANACTORIA

No, no, you doting bride: Alcæus. Quick,
What said he when he bade you bring me this?

ATTHIS

But that is not for you. — Ah! twist me not!
Thou hurtest my arm.

ANACTORIA

Speak, then!

ATTHIS

What should I say?

ANACTORIA

Whom is this for?

ATTHIS

For Sappho.

ANACTORIA

[*Loosing Atthis, with a cry.*]

She it was!

[*Sinks crouching upon the steps.*]

ALCÆUS

[*Calls outside.*]

Atthis!

ATTHIS

[*To Anactoria.*]

My friend! I did not guess. — Forgive!

[*Enter, left,* ALCÆUS. *He addresses Atthis, who stands before Anactoria.*]

ALCÆUS

Hath Sappho seen it? Hast thou shown it her?
What did she say?

ANACTORIA

[*Holding the vase, rises.*]

Your lady's in the temple,
Training the chorus of her girl-disciples.
This votive urn of incense from your lips
Hath not yet breathèd in her delicate ear
"Passion eternal!"

ALCÆUS

By Hephæstus, how
Came you with this?

ANACTORIA

Oh, by Alcæus, how
Came this to you: this mad, this hollow love?
Look! "Maid of Lesbos, murmuring one name
Within this vase, thy lover's lips" — And are
Sappho and Anactoria one name?
How ardent hast thou murmured that one name
Up at my casement: "Anactoria!"
Now hers to her! No other eyes but Sappho's
Had done it! — Atthis, that it should be she
Whom best I love, our mistress and our muse,
Hath drawn him from me! So she draws the world,
Day, evening, and the dawn, to wait on her —
Maiden and man, like an immortal.

ALCÆUS

So
Love draws us all.

ANACTORIA

Not all! To some of us
Love beacons like a star.

ALCÆUS

[*Smiling.*]

A shooting-star!
That nightly fills anew his fiery quiver!

ANACTORIA

And this is thou — Alcæus! O this air
Goes black and red between us. Fare you well;
But when your Sappho comes here from the singing,
Take her your gift —

[*From the height of the steps, she flings the vase at his feet, dashing it in pieces.*]

and when you lift it up,
Tell her it is the heart of her girl-friend.

[*Exit, right.*]

ALCÆUS

[*To Atthis.*]

Nothing of this to Sappho!

ATTHIS

Dost thou deem
Others as false as thou art? She shall know.

ALCÆUS

[*Springing up the steps.*]

But Atthis —

[*Exit Atthis within the temple.*]

If she tells her!

[*Watching persons approach, he starts violently.*]

Pittacus!

[*Enter, left,* PITTACUS, *followed by a soldier, to whom he speaks.*]

PITTACUS

Say to the citizens, I will not hold
Council to-day. The sea-wind blows too sweet
Of lentisk and of samphire for my thoughts
To brood on war; the eyes of Sappho are
A mightier tyranny than Mitylene. —
Wait; it were wiser to omit that last.

[*Exit the soldier.*]

ALCÆUS

O seven wise men of the world in one!
Most civic lover — *to omit that last!*

PITTACUS

Greeting, Alcæus!

ALCÆUS

Pittacus is gone
To smell the south wind. Therefore, citizens,
Adjourn the council! It were wiser not
Allude to tyranny and Sappho's eyes,
For Pittacus, elected by the people,
Must keep one eye or two for votes. Enough,
He hath a nose enamoured of the south wind!
What was that odorous phrase? — Lentisk and samphire!

PITTACUS

Alcæus still is young.

ALCÆUS

And Pittacus a lover!
What says Archilochus:
"*Lovers that stink of leeks*
Put samphire in their songs."

PITTACUS

In temper temperance,
My friend.

ALCÆUS

In lack of sense
Sententiousness, O sage!
How is philosophy
Selling per pound? I mean
Without the fat, of course.

PITTACUS

Is not this feud too old
For us to blow up fire
In the ashes?

ALCÆUS

'Tis as old
As when you, gutter-tyrant,
Imprisoned me — a noble
And knight of Lesbos.

PITTACUS

For
Sedition. Yet it seems
You now go free.

ALCÆUS

Bright gods,
Witness this gentle tyrant!
Look where the shouting people
Crown him with garlic leaves;

For he hath freed from prison
Alcæus the seditious!
Hail him Magnanimous,
And grant him in the Assembly —
A thousand extra votes!

PITTACUS

Sir, you go far.

ALCÆUS

Nay, grant him
For that great-minded deed,
Fair Sappho's admiration!

PITTACUS

Insolence!

ALCÆUS

Hypocrite!

PITTACUS

[*Raising his staff.*]

Go!

ALCÆUS

Sniggling demagogue!

[*Enter, right,* PHAON — *his shoulders stooped beneath a burden of drift-wood. Moving toward the temple, his path lies between Alcæus and Pittacus.*]

PITTACUS

Thou, swollen-up with words
And bitter wind, presumptuous
Fop —

ALCÆUS

Mule of Mitylene,
Bray! Let the temple fillies
Hark to thy hee-haw.

PITTACUS

Zeus,
Chastise this man!

[*Striking at Alcæus, who springs back, the staff of Pittacus falls and breaks upon Phaon, who receives the blow with mute passivity and passes on to the temple. Pittacus slowly lets fall the pieces of his staff.*]

Eternal Zeus, thy hand
Hath interposed this slave. Look where he goes,
Alcæus; dumb, submissive, yet my blow
Fell undeserved.

ALCÆUS

A pack-beast!

PITTACUS

True; and yet
His silence hath a peace majestical,
His unresistingness, an awe! 'Tis we
That, by comparison, are petty: we
That for a snarling ideality
Yelp at each other like Actæon's dogs
To tear our master — our own self-command.
Ah, passionless indifference! That we
Might rather live like yonder sea-drudge, callous
To quickening beauty, and incapable
Of joy or anguish of imagination,
Than thus in bondage of enamour'd pain

For that immortal being, Sappho, rage
Vituperate and scorn each other, clutch'd
Mind against mind, man against man, to possess her.

ALCÆUS

[*Cynically.*]

Still you remain to rage.

PITTACUS

No; fare you well,
Alcæus: go you in to Sappho first
And I will come hereafter. Better were it —
Far better than this venom'd wrangling — there
From Aphrodite's rock into the sea
For us to adventure the Leucadian leap:
That leap which brings to passionate lovers — death,
Or from the goddess, ultimate repose.

[*He passes from the scene, right. Alcæus stands for a moment, moved by his words. Within the temple voices once more lift up the Sapphic hymn. Then from the temple emerge, singing, the* GIRL-DISCIPLES *of Sappho, and pass, left, away toward Mitylene.* SAPPHO *herself, followed at a little distance by Atthis, comes slowly down the steps, twining a fillet of violets, lost in the music. Seeing her, Alcæus approaches, passionate, but pauses — abashed by her presence.*]

THE GIRL-DISCIPLES

Gath'rers, what have ye forgot
Hymenæon!
Blushing ripe on the end of the bough?
Hymenæon!

Ripe now, but ye may not reach,
For the bride is won, and the groom is strong.
Kala, O Charïessa!

[*Exeunt.*]

ALCÆUS

Lady of violets and reverie,
Sappho — I long to speak, but shame restrains me.

SAPPHO

Alcæus, had your thoughts been beautiful,
Nor any double-speech upon your tongue,
Shame would not turn away your eyes from mine;
You would have spoken simply to me now.

ALCÆUS

It is not simple to say beautifully
What I would say. — Hast thou, in Mitylene,
Watched the young market-maidens weaving fillets
Of wild flowers? Know you what men say 'tis sign of?

SAPPHO

Is it a sign?

ALCÆUS

That all such are in love.
Truly they are but country maids, and yet
Persephone herself was such a girl
Weaving *her* wild-flowers when dark Pluto plucked her.
Lady, you too are weaving: may I ask
For whom?

SAPPHO

[*Holding out the fillet.*]

And if I answered — for Alcæus?

ALCÆUS

[*Ardent.*]

Sappho!

SAPPHO

[*Withholding the fillet.*]

And if I gave this — to another!

[*Stooping, she lifts a fragment of the broken vase and reads.*]

"*Within this vase thy lover's lips have vowed*" —

The vow itself is cracked: how came it broken?

ALCÆUS

[*Bitterly.*]

Atthis hath told thee!

SAPPHO

Anactoria

Is dear to me.

ALCÆUS

But she should understand:

I loved her, and I love her now no more.

Well, if for this she weeps, let her revile

The god, not me. — Can I constrain a god?

Tether him? Clip his wings? Say 'come' or 'go'?

Love is a voyager, and like the wind

That shakes awhile the summer woods with music

Moves on, to stir the hearts of unknown bowers.

SAPPHO

O love in man! How then in woman? What
If Anactoria had scorned Alcæus?
Is there a god and eke a goddess Love:
The one all vagrant, lawless, unrestrained,
Self-seeking ardour? The other — all compassion'd
Submissive constancy? How would it fare
With us, Alcæus, had you won my love
And I should prove untrue?

[*From the right, Anactoria enters and rejoins Atthis at the steps of the shrine. There, while Atthis seeks gently to distract her, she keeps her eyes fixed in passionate brooding upon Sappho and Alcæus. The latter is about to reply to Sappho, when she stays him with a smile and gesture.*]

It matters not.
Love is indeed goddess and god, and man
And woman, and the world! What shall it boot
To argue with the shy anemone,
Or reason with the rose? — This air is spring,
And on this isle of flowers we all are lovers.

ALCÆUS

Ah, then you love me, Sappho!

SAPPHO

By what token?

ALCÆUS

Even by this speech of thine.

SAPPHO

Eyes are the tongues
Of lovers, and their speech is light, not sound,
Therefore you know not Love's infallible
Tokens.

ALCÆUS

But tell me!

SAPPHO

Grant it then — I love you:
Then, were it so, what need had you to ask?
For should I see you but a little instant,
Then is my voice choked and my tongue is broken;
Under my flesh quick fire runs flame and quivers;
My eyes look blank on darkness; sounds of roaring
Sing in mine ears; chiller than death the frore dews
Danken my limbs, and pale as grass in autumn,
I tremble.

[*Smiling.*]

Are the tokens manifest?

[*From the temple reënters Phaon without his burden. As Sappho turns her face archly from Alcæus, her eyes fall upon the slave, who, oblivious, with dreamy gaze fixed upon the sea, approaches and passes her by, silent as a sleep-walker. Following his figure unconsciously with her look, Sappho — with rapid gradation changing in mood and aspect — begins to show visibly the tokens she has been describing, till overwhelming faintness closes her eyes.*]

ALCÆUS

Why do you mock me, lady? Pain of hope,
Pain of desire are punishment enough,
Without your irony. — Gods, thou art pale!
What is it, Sappho? Ha! thou hast *not* mocked me!
You tremble: Nay, poor fool, me — happy fool!
Now, now I understand.

SAPPHO

[*Faintly.*]

Not now.

ALCÆUS

[*With lowered voice.*]

I know;
Eyes only speak, and yours are eloquent;
They follow yonder slave to where she stands
Watching us there. — Her jealousy is mad;
Let it not move thee; it can touch us not;
And what are we to Anactoria
That — lean on me!

[*He reaches to support Sappho, whose eyes have closed. Exit Phaon, right.*]

SAPPHO

Later — to-night.

ALCÆUS

But Sappho —

SAPPHO

Under the stars to-night; here, by the temple —
[*Slowly, looking away right.*]
When there are no slaves passing.

ALCÆUS

[*Kissing her robe.*]
Till to-night!

[*He departs by the colonnade, exultant. Sappho stands silent, shaken by deep breaths of a great emotion. Anactoria, whose eyes have never left Sappho's face, seeing her now alone, leaves Atthis who seeks fearfully to detain her by catching at a lyre which Anactoria carries rigidly in her arm.*]

ATTHIS

Wait; let me play to thee!

[*Unheeding, Anactoria approaches Sappho and comes very close, before Sappho, opening her arms with a glad start, embraces her.*]

SAPPHO

My 'Toria.

[*Allowing Sappho to draw her face close to hers, Anactoria speaks then in a tense, low voice. Before she has finished speaking, she springs loose, with a spurning gesture.*]

ANACTORIA

Oh, that I were a beast on the wild hills,
And I had borne thee to my twilight lair
Alive, and there had bitten thee to death,
And dabbled all thy beauty in the dew —
And *he* to look upon it!

SAPPHO

'Toria!

ANACTORIA

[*Wildly.*]

Oh, call me not that name; it is too dear.
So did you call me first that silver night
Below your orchard, when you taught me first
To strike this plectron on this lyre. — You kissed me
And cried: "Well played, my 'Toria!"

SAPPHO

And so
I'll kiss thee, dear, a thousand silver nights.

ANACTORIA

[*Holding the plectron like a daggeret.*]

Come not so close; I'll scratch thy cheek with this,
And stencil in thy blood Alcæus' name,
That all may read how Sappho loved her friend.

SAPPHO

[*To Atthis.*]

And so for this she would she were a beast
To dabble all my beauty in the dew!

[*Turning to Anactoria with gentle laughter.*]

O girl!

ANACTORIA

I heard you bid him come to-night.

SAPPHO

I said to-night?

ANACTORIA

Wilt thou deny it?

SAPPHO

Let
Alcæus come to-night, then. I will be
Punctual to his coming, and if thou
Hast deemed me ever a wise art-mistress, trust me
To teach him such a lesson then in love
As he shall long remember — for *thy* sake.
Come, wilt thou love thine old friend — one night more?

ANACTORIA

[*Going to her and embracing her knees.*]

O dear and mighty! Thou art not as we.

SAPPHO

A goddess once again? No cheeks, eyes, elbows
To be restored? Why, truly, then, these poets
Are wise who sing: "Hail, Sappho, thou tenth Muse!"
Therefore rise up, sweet mortal, and attend
How I shall prove my Musehood by a song.

[*Taking the lyre from Anactoria.*]

Hand me the plectron. — Atthis, sit with us
Here. 'Tis a Linus-song for vintagers
To chant in autumn. Therefore, 'Toria,
If thou wilt weep, weep not for Cupid, but
Adonis. — Kiss me! Now this will I sing
Deftly to please my girl-friends.

[*Sappho is seated on the marble bench, right; Atthis on the ground before her. Anactoria, standing beside the bench, turns away while Sappho sings and, overcome with restrained weeping, steals off through the colonnade. Meantime, from the right, Pittacus has appeared and stands listening, unseen.*]

What shall we do, Cytherea?
Tender Adonis is dying!
What shall we do?
Rend, rend your delicate tunics,
Rend, rend your breasts, O my maidens:
Weep — *Ai le nu!*

[*Looking after Anactoria.*]

Poor jealousy! — Run, fetch her back to us,
And take her this.

ATTHIS

[*Taking the lyre from Sappho.*]

I fear she will not come.

[*Exit.*]

PITTACUS

[*Approaches Sappho with hesitating deference.*]

Clear voice of Lesbos —

SAPPHO

[*Turning.*]

Lord of Mitylene!

PITTACUS

Lady, in Athens, the last time I met
Solon, the tyrant, he was in his garden,
And where he sat the almond-blossoms fell
On his white hair. He had thrown his parchments down
And looked on me with eyes that saw me not,
For near him stood a slender, thrush-voiced boy
Gushing a song. And when the boy had ceased,
"Whose song was that?" he asked. The boy said,
"Sappho's:"
And Solon, speaking low, said: "Sing that only!
So that I may not die before I learn it."

SAPPHO

Solon was wise; my songs are beautiful.

PITTACUS

For they are you. Sappho, I also am
Tyrant and lawgiver. My function 'tis
In war and peace to engineer this isle,
And through the level conduits of the mind
To irrigate the state with the still waters
Of reason; I have schooled and flogged my will
With the iron whips of Sparta; and my words
Are sown abroad for wisdom; yet — O hear me!
Thy voice hath loosed in me a thousand streams
That overleap their banks, and inundate
My ordered world with passion; vain it is
I strive to dam those springs; their foaming tides

Burst into glorious laughter, and I drown
Rapturous; vain it is I charge my soul —
This love is madness, peril and despair!
I *know* that it is madness — yet I love you.

SAPPHO

Are you, then, mad? Does not supreme desire
Beget the supreme joy? This engineered,
Wise-ordered state of yours — when you have cast
Its lovers forth on some bleak lepers' rock
In the barren sea; when you have builded all
Its solemn temples of serenity,
And sculptured on its gates your city's god —
The massy image of Indifference;
When you have set up in the public ways
Fountains of running reason, where cold virgins
And silent boys, with philosophic beards,
Fill their chaste pitchers, and turn dumbly home
To tipple with their grandsires — tell me, then!
Will you not fear, some day, an insurrection,
When those same boys and girls, with flying hair
And eyes aflame, shall drag you in the market
And cry: "Our lovers! Give us back our lovers!
Give us our mad joys and our loves again!"

PITTACUS

Sappho, the wild bees of Persuasion hive
Between your lips. Call me what name you will:
Sage — madman; only take from me my gift
In love.

SAPPHO

What do you offer?

PITTACUS

Mitylene.

SAPPHO

As mine?

PITTACUS

To rule with me.

SAPPHO

Is not such rather
A man's, not woman's office?

PITTACUS

Yours alone
Of women! See, a little while ago
I brought this staff to you: you were in the temple,
And here I met Alcæus; here for you
We wrangled, and in wrath I lifted this
And left it — so.

SAPPHO

Heigh me! A vase, a sceptre:
And now both dashed in pieces at my feet!
Surely this Sappho is a stony image
And not a maid, to shatter such love-tokens.
You struck Alcæus?

PITTACUS

No, by chance the blow
Fell on a passing slave.

SAPPHO

[*Slowly.*]

You said — a slave ?

PITTACUS

A sea-drudge
With drift-wood for Poseidon's
Night-fire.

SAPPHO

[*Breathing quick.*]

Give me the pieces.
His flesh, you say ?

PITTACUS

His flesh ?
It did not strike Alcæus !

SAPPHO

[*Feeling the staff's splintered edge.*]

No, but his bare flesh ! On
His shoulder ?

PITTACUS

It struck only
The slave.

SAPPHO

[*Quivering.*]

The bright blood started !

PITTACUS

There sprang no blood, dear lady; the staff broke
Against the fagots on the fellow's shoulder. —
All for mere words! Alcæus had but gibed me
With foolish words. Judge now if I have need
Of you, to sway the staff of Mitylene.

SAPPHO

[*After a brief pause.*]

True, Pittacus; why should we not splice these
In one, and wield this staff together? Grant
I'm but a slave, being but woman; yet
If you, that are the maker of your law,
If you detect in me this civic gift
Surpassing woman, shall you not then leap
This breach of sex, and make me your true mate —
Greatly your wife and lover?

PITTACUS

Speak with pity!
Let me not doubt I hear this.

SAPPHO

Hear it well,
For I would reason, too: A slave, I said,
But — turn the tables! *You* are now the slave
(No maid as I, but such a bondman, say,
As that same drift-wood bearer whom you struck),
And I am maiden-tyrant of Mitylene,
Over all Lesbos lawgiver of love.

PITTACUS

Even as thou art!

SAPPHO

Why then, you poor base slave,
If I detect in your sea-sinew'd limbs
Olympian graces moving, if I see
Far in your cold deep eyes dæmonic fire
Outburning the eye-glance of a faun in love,
If I behold in you, outcast, my kin
Congenial spirit, may I not reach to you
My tyrant's staff, and raise you at my side —
No more a thing for men to scorn, but now
Greatly my lord and lover?

PITTACUS

What would . . .?

SAPPHO

Wait!
Or must I now because I am a woman,
Forego the tyrant's great prerogative —
To make mine own law?

PITTACUS

Sappho, but to what
Leads this? I do not follow you.

SAPPHO

It leads
To the Golden Age. If you would get my love,
Follow me there.

[*Turning away, Sappho springs to the steps of Aphrodite's shrine.*]

PITTACUS

Have you, then, only mocked me?
Am I to come no more?

SAPPHO

[*Pausing.*]

Nay, Pittacus,
I have but mocked myself. Come when you will.

PITTACUS

To-night? Under these olives?

SAPPHO

When you will;
And so, good-by! Oh, you have given me thoughts
To make the woman tremble in me.

PITTACUS

Sappho!

[*With a gesture of love toward her, as she turns again to the steps, he departs, left. Sappho, having mounted to the shrine, prostrates herself before it; then — facing the Ægean, seated, her arms about her knees, plastic, silent — gazes down upon the waves. From the colonnade Atthis enters and searches about with her eyes.*]

ATTHIS

Where art thou, Sappho?

[*Discovering her, Atthis ascends the steps.*]

Anactoria
Is wilful, and she swears she will not come
Again, till she has sought Alcæus out

And dragged him to thy scorn. — Thou hast not heard me.
Sweet mistress, here is Atthis. What hath happened
That like an image thou sittst staring?

SAPPHO

[*In a low voice.*]

Hark!
She is calling me.

ATTHIS

Who calls?

SAPPHO

My mother.

ATTHIS

[*Starting.*]

Sappho!

SAPPHO

Dost thou not hear her sob and sing below us?
Her hollow lute is turquoise, and she touches
The silver strings of ever-roaring reefs
Far off to sound her awful lullaby;
And while she croons, between her foaming breasts —
Like infants at their milk — Hyperion lies
And heaving Triton dreams. Us too, us mortals,
She suckles there, and there she buries us.

ATTHIS

What new hymn art thou musing?

SAPPHO

Listen again!
Oh, such a sobbing cry did Thetis make
That night she rose beside the blood-starr'd beach

Of Troy, to her great son Achilles, ere
He died. Me, too, she calls: I sink, I sink!
Atthis, I have heard the whirling cliff-birds scream,
And watched my breaths burst up through the green
wave
In moons of opal fire.

ATTHIS

I am afraid;
Is it some goddess calls thee?

SAPPHO

'Tis the sea,
The teeming, terrible, maternal sea
That spawned us all. She calls me back to her,
But I will not go. Her womb hath brought me forth
A child defiant. I will be free of her!
Her ways are birth, fecundity, and death,
But mine are beauty and immortal love.
Therefore I will be tyrant of myself —
Mine own law will I be! And I will make
Creatures of mind and melody, whose forms
Are wrought of loveliness without decay,
And wild desire without satiety,
And joy and aspiration without death;
And on the wings of those shall I, I, Sappho!
Still soar and sing above these cliffs of Lesbos,
Even when ten thousand blooms of men and maids
Are fallen and withered — there.

[*Peering below, she touches Atthis' arm and points.*]

What man is that?

ATTHIS

Where?

SAPPHO

There, beneath us, where the cliff-path leaves
The beach. See, he is climbing toward our faces.

ATTHIS

I am dizzy.

SAPPHO

He is clinging to the rock
Of garnet, where the sea-doves build their nests.
He is reaching over it. — Atthis, he will fall!

ATTHIS

I see him now — a fisherman: his net
Is over his shoulder.

SAPPHO

He hath seized it, look —
A young dove! And he brings it in the net.

ATTHIS

A slave.

SAPPHO

Know you his name?

ATTHIS

His name is Phaon.

SAPPHO

[*Slowly.*]

Phaon! And so 'tis Phaon! and forever
'Sappho and Phaon.'

ATTHIS

Dost thou muse again?

SAPPHO

When lovers' names are born, their syllables
Fall like the snowflakes of Apollo's tears,
That crystallize in song.

[*Murmuring.*]

— Sappho and Phaon!

ATTHIS

'Tis not a slave like others. You have heard
What the old sea-wives whisper.

SAPPHO

No.

ATTHIS

Of him
And Aphrodite?

SAPPHO

[*Eagerly.*]

Nay, what do they whisper?

ATTHIS

They say that once, when Phaon was a boy,
One twilight, when the Ægean was uptorn
By mighty wind and thunder, and the fish-folk
Prayed in their harbours — at the tempest's height,
Appeared upon the beach an old, poor woman
And begged a passage to the mainland. None
Heard her but scoffed or cursed her; only Phaon
Unloosed his boat, and rowed her through the storm
To Lydia. At dawn, when he returned,
His look was altered and he spoke strange things;
How, when his boat reached mainland, the poor hag
Had cast her cloak and sprung, with burning limbs,
Upon the sands — a goddess! Since which night
(They say) he hath grown up indifferent
To all his kith and kind; to laughter, love,
And slave-girls singing. — 'Tis a pretty tale;
Wouldst thou not love to make a song of it?

SAPPHO

In truth, my Atthis, 'tis a moving tale,
And I should love to make a song of it.
Leave me!

ATTHIS

Wilt thou compose it on the spot?
Nay, then I'll go for news of Larichus.

[*Atthis departs toward Mitylene. Sappho, left alone, descends from the shrine and leans against one of the temple pillars. From the cliff-path, Phaon enters. About him is flung a sea-net, under the hanging folds of which he holds in his hands, enmeshed, a white dove.*

Seeing him, Sappho withdraws into the temple through the tapestries, from between which she soon looks forth again. Slowly Phaon descends the broad steps and, sitting upon the last, extricates the dove from the net. As he rises with it in his hand and goes toward the altar of Poseidon, Sappho — unseen of him — comes from the temple and descends the steps behind him. Having reached the altar, Phaon is about to lift a knife which lies upon it, when Sappho stays his arm. Seeing her, he bends low in a subjected manner.]

SAPPHO

The dove: what wouldst thou with the wild thing?

PHAON

[*Serenely.*]

Kill it.

SAPPHO

It struggles. See, is not it beautiful?

PHAON

I know not; you have spoken.

SAPPHO

But for whom
Wilt thou then kill it, bondman?

PHAON

For Poseidon;
The god is angry.

SAPPHO

Oh, not for Poseidon!
His sacrifice is death; to Aphrodite
Give it! For her the sacrifice is life.
Give it to me and I will dedicate it
Alive to Aphrodite, for it is
Her sacred bird. Look, I will give thee this —
My bracelet — for the dove.

PHAON

[*Taking, as at a command, Sappho's bracelet, releases the dove into her hands.*]

'Tis yours.

SAPPHO

Her shrine
Is yonder. I will loose it to her there.

[*Starting for the shrine, Sappho treads upon the net, which Phaon before has let fall beside the steps. Pausing, she looks back at him, where he stands intent upon the gleaming bracelet in his hand. For a moment she continues to look at Phaon thus, then, wrapping the dove in her filmy scarf, and placing it with her flowers on the steps, she lifts the net where it lies.*]

Thy net is torn.

PHAON

I climbed here from the beach.
It caught on the cliff-rocks.

SAPPHO

I will mend it.

PHAON

[*For the first time gazing at her.*]

You!

[*Fastening one end of the net — somewhat more than shoulder-high — to the tripod on the altar, Sappho secures the other end to the bronze caryatid, right. Thus* (*the net cutting the foreground obliquely from the middle*) *her face is separated from Phaon's by the interlaced strands, some of which — hanging torn — leave gaps in the fibre.*]

SAPPHO

To mend is woman's task.

PHAON

[*In wonder.*]

Are you a woman?

SAPPHO

Perhaps I am what women yearn to be:
Man.

PHAON

Did you grow here in the temple?

SAPPHO

Where
I grew, or in what garden by the spray
Or wave-lit cave my spirit's seed was sown,
Surely 'tis thou who knowest: for methinks
Thou also grewest there.

PHAON

It may be so.

SAPPHO

Stood we not then as now? and raised as now
The net between us?

PHAON

[*Strangely.*]

Somewhat I remember.

SAPPHO

And even as now thine eyes shone through the meshes,
And mine in thine: was it not always so?

PHAON

[*Indifferent, begins to tie strands of the net.*]

'Tis broken.

SAPPHO

Ah, but shall be mended! I
Will tie the fibres.

[*In silence now for a little, they stand mending the net: Phaon before it, dumbly engrossed in his task; Sappho, from behind, thrusting at times her white hand or arm through a gap to reach for a strand, and keeping her eyes burningly intent upon Phaon.*]

You are a boatman.

PHAON

Yes.

SAPPHO

Go you alone upon the water?

PHAON

Yes.

SAPPHO

When you are all alone, are you afraid?

PHAON

No.

SAPPHO

Put you ever far to sea?

PHAON

Sometimes.

SAPPHO

And have you never rowed to the mainland?

PHAON

Oft.

SAPPHO

By tempest?

PHAON

Once.

SAPPHO

A storm at twilight?

PHAON

Once.

SAPPHO

Oh, is it true, then, what the sea-wives tell?
Was she a goddess?

PHAON

Long ago! 'twas long
Ago. I was a boy, and that's all dark.

SAPPHO

And have you never seen her since she sprang
Burning, upon the sands of Lydia?

PHAON

[*Momentarily ardent.*]
Sometimes methought — I know not.

SAPPHO

Still you dreamed
You saw.

PHAON

How knowest thou?

SAPPHO

Tell me your dreams.

[*After a pause, Phaon — with a rapt smile — speaks. While he does so, Sappho — who has unwittingly tied his left wrist in one of the meshes where his hand rests — comes round to the other side of the net, and draws near to him.*]

PHAON

Oft ere the day, while all the slaves are sleeping,
I and my boat put out on the black water;
Under us there and over us, the stars sing
Songs of that silence.
Soon then the sullen, brazen-hornèd oxen
Rise in the east, and slowly with their wind-ploughs
Break in the acres of the broad Ægean
Furrows of fire.
So, many a time there, as I leaned to watch them
Yoked in their glory, sudden 'gainst the sunrise
Seemed that there stood a maiden — a bright shadow —

SAPPHO

Ah, you beheld her!

[*From the colonnade, behind the farthest pillar, Alcæus and Anactoria enter and pause. Anactoria, nearly concealed by the pillar, points out to Alcæus the figures (on the opposite side of the net) of Phaon and Sappho, where, standing together, they are visible through the meshes. Alcæus' face darkens. Sappho, not seeing them, speaks in a low, impassioned voice to Phaon.*]

Look in my face. What were her features like —
Hers, that bright shadow?

PHAON

I am tangled; you
Have tied me in the mesh.

SAPPHO

I tied you?

PHAON

Here —
My wrist.

SAPPHO

Did I do this?

PHAON

You see — the noose.

SAPPHO

But did you feel me tie this?

PHAON

No.

SAPPHO

[*Murmurs.*]

'Twas she!
Your hand is fast; know you who made it fast?
'Twas she: her fingers drew these knots.

PHAON

Untie them.

[*Alcæus, darkly, and Anactoria, radiant, withdraw unseen.*]

SAPPHO

Nay, but who knows what wise, unconscious plot
Her deft, strange fingers wove to trap thee? Thou
Perchance hast trespassed here too near her shrine,
And, having stranded thee in thine own net,
She now is loath to toss thee back again
In the sea, to thy dumb mermen.

PHAON

[*Working with his right hand.*]

They are fine,
These knots.

SAPPHO

And so perchance, for chastisement,
She hath contrived this noose to keep thee here
In speech with her, till thou shalt call to mind
The face, and name the name, of her you love.

PHAON

I mind it well — her face. Unloose me.

SAPPHO

Look!
Is it a dream-face still? — A shadow?

PHAON

No;
'Tis with me days and nights. It is familiar.

SAPPHO

And yours to her familiar as these nights
And days — and yet as worshipful and strange.

PHAON

[*Fascinated.*]

Untie me.

SAPPHO

First, her name! You may not slip
Her noose, till you have guessed the name of her
You love.

PHAON

I know it well.

SAPPHO

[*Smiling.*]

Methinks you boast
To seem more skilled than she in guessing yours.
How call you her?

PHAON

Thalassa.

SAPPHO

[*After a pause.*]

What is that?

PHAON

Her name.

SAPPHO

What's she?

PHAON

A slave.

SAPPHO

And what is she
To you?

PHAON

She's mine; maketh my fire.

SAPPHO

Ah!

PHAON

Loose me.

SAPPHO

You do not dwell alone, then?

PHAON

No.

SAPPHO

You are wed?

PHAON

We are slaves; slaves are not wed.

SAPPHO

No; but you love her.

PHAON

Yes; children have I got with her; the bairn
Is stricken of the fever.

SAPPHO

[*Seizing the knife, cuts the meshes of the net.*]

Go; you are free.

[*Phaon goes, silent.*]

Stay; I have cut your wrist.

PHAON

A scratch.

SAPPHO

It bleeds.

PHAON

The bairn is sick and I must sacrifice
A young dove to our lord Poseidon. Soon
Its mother will be here, to pray with me
For the babe's life.

SAPPHO

Where is its mother now?

PHAON

She is gone up to the city, to the house
Of Sappho — the great lady.

SAPPHO

Oh, of Sappho!
What does she there?

PHAON

She is gone to the slave-quarters
With crawfish and sea-tortoise for a feast.
Methinks the lady's brother shall be wed
To-morrow.

SAPPHO

She is gone to the slave-quarters. —
Let see thy wrist. — The house of Sappho is
A slave's house. — Ah, the blood!

[*Tearing a shred from her garment, she binds his wrist.*]

I, too, have heard
Of Sappho — the great slave.

PHAON

Nay, 'tis a noble
Maiden of Lesbos. At Apollo's feast
Once, in the crowd, I saw her fillet pass
Above the virgins' heads into the palace,
And all the people shouted : *Io Sappho !*

SAPPHO

Believe it not ; the people were deceived.
I know her well and she was born in chains —
A weak and wretched fellow-slave of thine,
Whose proudest joy were but to bind the hurt
Which she hath given thee, even as I do now.
Dost thou not hear me? Whereon dost thou gaze?

PHAON

[*Looking off, left.*]

She is coming.

SAPPHO

Phaon ! Phaon !

PHAON

[*For the first time turning upon her a wild unconscious look of love, grasps his bound wrist tightly.*]

Ah ! it pains.

[*Enter* THALASSA, *bearing a willow basket of strange design. She is dishevelled with seaweed and her long, fair hair, tinged with the green of salt ooze, has partly slipped its fillet of vari-coloured shells. She moves impassively to Phaon, and speaks in a low monotone.*]

THALASSA

The day's dead; the moon's with child;
The tide's full. I saw far out
A shark's fin. — Poseidon calls.
Hast killed it?

PHAON

[*Pointing toward Sappho.*]

She bade me not.

THALASSA

[*Turning to Sappho, who shrinks from her behind the net, bows herself low in obeisance.*]

What Sappho forbiddeth thee
The sea-god hath bidden thee. —
The babe shall have sacrifice.

PHAON

[*Looking at Sappho, with a rush of thought.*]

'What, Sappho' — !

THALASSA

The sea-dove — where
Didst hide it?

PHAON

'Tis there.

[*As Thalassa goes toward the steps.*]

'Tis hers.
She bought it; this bracelet gave
To save its life.

THALASSA

Give it me.

[*Taking the bracelet from Phaon, she holds it against the sunset, turning and turning it in the light.*]

PHAON

[*Standing at a distance.*]

And are you Sappho? Yet did speak my name,
And bind my wrist, and call yourself a slave!

SAPPHO

And art thou Phaon? Phaon for whom the stars
Sang, and the brazen-hornèd oxen ploughed
The acres of the sunrise? Yet thou lovest — this?

PHAON

You said: "I know her well, and she was born
In chains — a fellow-slave!" What did you mean?

SAPPHO

[*Gazing, curious and incredulous.*]

Thalassa!

THALASSA

[*Slipping the bracelet over her arm.*]

It shineth fine:
See, Phaon!

SAPPHO

Thalassa, where's
Thy home?

THALASSA

On the beach we sleep
Together.

SAPPHO

What dost thou for
Thy lover?

THALASSA

For him I keep
Food, fire, and the babe and boy.

SAPPHO

And what wilt thou do to make
His labour and name to grow
Magnificent over the isles?

THALASSA

[*Returns Sappho's enkindled gaze with proud serenity.*]
More bairns will I bear to him.

SAPPHO

And they — when the frost of death
Hath gathered both thee and him —
Shall *they* too but live — to live?
Be born still to bear again
Procreative things that die?

PHAON

[*Having listened, vaguely fearful, moves now between the two women, and draws Thalassa, protectingly.*]

Cease, cease! — Thalassa, come with me. Her eyes!
They burn us through the net. O come away!

THALASSA

[*As she goes with Phaon, raises her arm with the bracelet, for Sappho to see.*]

This gold will I give the bairn
To play with. — Keep thou the dove.

PHAON

[*With a gesture of yearning toward Sappho, departs in the falling twilight, his voice broken with pain.*]

Thalassa!

[*Sappho, through the net, watching them together till they disappear, seizes then the net before her and, tearing it down, rends once the meshes with her hands.*]

SAPPHO

Aphrodite! Aphrodite!
Now, now thy net is torn, thy bird is free.

[*Springing to the steps, she lifts the sea-dove and unwinds from about it the filmy scarf.*]

O darling bird, which art my beating soul,
That Phaon captured on these wild sea-cliffs,
Mount up, mount up! and nestle with thy wings
Against the burning chlamys of heaven's queen
There where her breast heaves highest. — Say to her:
" Lady of love, almighty! This is Sappho —
Her spirit — whom thou madest of that fire
Which sleeps in Phaon's eyes. Lo, I am his,
And I will make him mine!" — This say to her,
My heart's bird, and beseech her, if she hears

My prayer, and sanctioneth my passionate
Resolve, that she will speed thee back to me
In token she approves. — Yet should she *not*,
Here do I choose, in spite of sea and heaven,
The sanction of myself.

[*Releasing the sea-dove.*]

Good-by, sweet bird!

[*On the steps, from her uplifted hand, she looses the bird, which takes wing into the sunset. Immediately Sappho springs up the steps and goes to the cliff's edge. There, standing against the subdued reflections of the Ægean, she follows the dove's far flight with her eyes.*]

[*Rising, the Herculaneum curtain shuts off the scene.*]

Here follows the Pantomime of the First Interlude.

Vide Appendix.

ACT II

ACT II

Early night of the same day. The temple and sea gleam vaguely under the moon. Tapers are burning beneath the outstretched stone wings of the dove on Aphrodite's shrine, and the urn of Poseidon glows with fire — a signal light to mariners. Swinging lamps twinkle in the olive grove. On the edge of the grove, alone, stands Pittacus in reverie. From all sides out of the night, arise the soft string-sounds of sweet instruments and the music of far laughter. In the near distance (from the left) the voice of Alcæus sings.

ALCÆUS

Wine, dear child, and truth
And youth and these lips of thine!
Wine from the crocus' cup
And truth from the poppy's heart
Drink to me
While I think of thee!
Think of me
While I drink, drink
Wine and youth
And truth from these lips of thine.

PITTACUS

[*Coming slowly down the steps.*]

'Tis silent now — that song; but still the silver shores
Are drench'd with dews of it; the olive groves — the air,

The ever-rhythmic waters — are in love. Of all
I only and the white stars are not amorous.
No more the wine of thee, dear child: the truth I drink!
And drinking that, I pass from madness into peace:
Peace *now*, yet should I look once more into her eyes,
What *then?*

[*Enter from the grove a Figure, clad in the cloak of a Greek soldier, wearing a helmet with long horse-hair plume, a gold breastplate, and greaves of gold.*]

THE FIGURE

[*Approaching Pittacus.*]

'Under these olives,' lord of Mitylene!

PITTACUS

[*Starting.*]

Her brother, Larichus.

[*Turning toward the Figure, pauses bewildered.*]

Not Sappho — you!

SAPPHO

'Under these olives' — was it not the place?
Well met, O Pittacus!

PITTACUS

In such a garb —

SAPPHO

The wise Athene walked at Ilium
Among the tetchy Greeks. The arbiter
Of men needs govern as a man. — Where is
Your tyrant's staff?

PITTACUS

[*Drawing back.*]

Keep from me, lest again
I lose the tranquil planet of my peace.
Let me depart from you.

SAPPHO

I will depart
When you have given me what I come to claim.

PITTACUS

All but my quiet soul.

SAPPHO

That girdle of keys.

PITTACUS

[*Feeling at his side.*]

They are the city keys.

SAPPHO

Which one of them
Unlocks the yoke-rings of the public slaves?

[*Pittacus loosens one.*]

Give me that one.

[*Reaching, snatches it from him with a glad sigh.*]

Now keep your quiet soul,
Philosopher: I will no more affray
Your sleep with my alarms.

[*She turns, and is leaving.*]

PITTACUS

[*Unmanned by her presence.*]

Yet do not go!

SAPPHO

Peace! You have put away with me the quest
Of happiness. Yours is the living pall,
The aloof and frozen place of listeners
And lookers-on at life. But mine — ah! mine
The fount of life itself, the burning spring
Pierian! — I pity you. Farewell!

[*Exit, left.*]

PITTACUS

Farewell, thou burning one and beautiful!
I pity *thee*, for thou must live to quench
With thine own tears thine elemental fire.

[*Enter Phaon, right.*]

PHAON

[*Groping toward the altar, moans low.*]

Poseidon! O Poseidon!

PITTACUS

Still this slave
That rises in my path to baffle me!

PHAON

Ah — ah, Poseidon!

PITTACUS

[*Drawing near.*]

Slave!

PHAON

[*Pausing, speaks confidingly.*]

Are you the god?

PITTACUS

[*Half bitterly.*]

The god! I have deserved thy question, slave.
Before, thy silence stung me — now thy words.

PHAON

Lord, lift it from me; take it from my eyes!
Why have you cast its dimness over me?

PITTACUS

What wouldst thou have me lift?

PHAON

It closes down.
Stretch forth your arm and draw it back to you.

PITTACUS

Look near: canst thou not see me?

PHAON

None I see!
The shore is gone! It shutteth out the stars,
Thicker and colder!

PITTACUS

What?

PHAON

The fog! The fog!
It shuts between us, and her far white face
Wanes toward me like the lady in the moon,
And now between the meshes I can see,
Like shrines, her two eyes burning.

PITTACUS

Even this one!
Is there none then too low? no piece of clay
But passion there will make its chrysalis
And kindle the worm wings? Rest, thou poor churl!

[*Exit slowly, right.*]

PHAON

[*Descending the steps supplicatingly.*]

Lord, be not angry! Take it from before
My face, and show me hers! Sweep it away,
And with your great hand show again the stars.

[*Enter from the grove Thalassa. Slung at her back, is a swaddled babe. At her side is a little boy of some four or five years — his sturdy, sun-tanned body naked, save for wreathings of sea-weed and kelp, partly concealing his torse and intertangling the oozy locks of his long hair. The child carries a tortoise' shell, with which — sitting upon the ground — he plays. Pausing at the top of the steps, Thalassa unbinds the infant from her back and takes it in her arms.*]

THALASSA

Io, my bairn! wakest thou?
Aye drowseth thy bonny head
Low! burneth thy little cheek
That erst it was cold as ice.
Io, my bairn! droop thee not
Away from thy mother's eyes;
Look up in them.

[*Descending the steps, Thalassa reaches the swaddled child toward Phaon, who stands by the altar, his face from hers, oblivious — staring ahead of him.*]

Phaon, take
The bairn to thee: might it smile
To lie in its father's arm
And feel it strong. — Phaon!

[*Turning about vaguely toward her, Phaon takes the outreached burden in his arms and holds it, rigid. Thalassa then, bending over, takes from her arm Sappho's bracelet and holds it dangling over the infant.*]

So!
Now shall my bairnling look up and see what the Lady of Lesbos
Hath given its father — a little gold dolphin instead of the sea-dove
For bairnling to hold in its fingers and play with and make it grow strong. Look!
Its eyes are the green little stones that burn in the shallows at low-tide,
And it bringeth a pearl in its mouth to please thee; aha! glint thine eye now
And look where the scales of it shine and shine in my bairnling's moon-beam,
And it hath a slippery silvery tail like a sea-maiden's.

[*Bending over closer.*]

Phaon!
It waketh not. Speak to it once! It sleepeth aye as in fire.

[*Snatching the babe from Phaon's arm and nestling it, passionate, she drops the bracelet on the ground.*]

A curse on the bright dark Lady of Lesbos! A curse on her shining
Arm-ring! Ah, naught it availeth the fever. Go! Go and seek thou
A victim and kill it. The wave-god is angry! worse is the bairn. — Go!

But seek first the house of Sappho and give her the gold thing back. — Go!

[*Phaon moves a dazed step, then remains motionless. Turning away, Thalassa, her face bent near to the babe in her arms, goes slowly up the steps.*]

Io, my bairn! Come away.
Now under the holy beam
Thy mother will pray for thee
That soon thou shalt wake and smile.
Io, my bairn! droop thee not
Away from thy mother's heart.

[*She passes into the temple. The little boy is about to follow, but, seeing the bracelet at Phaon's feet, he runs back, and lifts it in his hand to his father.*]

THE CHILD

Babbo!

PHAON

Thy voice it is! Bion, thy face!
Methought it had been hers till thy young eyes
Shone through her misty hair: and now that mist
Fades in the moon away.

[*Smiling at the child, he sits on the altar steps and takes him in his arms.*]

How creptst thou here,
Sand-snail? Aye stickest to thy Babbo's side
Like a spar of drift-wood. Ever at evening
When roweth Babbo weary to the beach,
Thou springest from the kelp, climbest his knees,

Showest thy day's sport. Tighter, tighter, bairn,
Thine arms about me! Keep thy father fast. —
Thou little piece of me, grow not so tall!
Taller than the iris-reeds that water-maids
Make into pipes for Pan to play upon.
Soon too shalt thou be ripe for him to play.
Nay, whither now? What new sport bringest here
To show me? — Tortoise! A young turtle's shell:
And was thine own catch? Flung him on the back!
Brave kill! — What shineth in thy fingers there?
Show me what 'tis.

[*The Child lifts to him again the dolphin-bracelet of Sappho. Phaon, staring at it, starts to his feet with his former gesture of passionate groping.*]

Poseidon! Ah, Poseidon!
Once more, once more, why blurrest thou the world!
Lift it away! Thy mist is over all.
Show me the path to her.

[*With wondering eyes, the Child takes Phaon's hand as if to lead.*]

'Tis bitter cold,
And is thy hand so small and warm? Lead on —

[*Slowly the Child leads his father up the steps toward the colonnade.*]

'Tis ticklish walking on the wet weed-slime
And naught but cloud to lean on — Lead the way.
Her house is yonder where the breakers are.

[*Reëntering with the infant from the temple, Thalassa steps forward between the first and second pillars. There, taking the bracelet from the boy's hand, she draws him with her away from his father and returns to the temple door.*]

THALASSA

This gold will *I* give to her
Back. Go thou to Sappho's gate
And ask of what hour to-night
She cometh to the temple. We
Shall wait thee here. Come to us!

[*She goes into the temple with the children. Phaon — his face lifted, his hand feeling before him — passes slowly off through the colonnade.*]

PHAON

Poseidon, — thy hand again!

[*Exit.*]

[*The voice of Alcæus calls outside in the olive-grove.*]

ALCÆUS

Boy! — Iacchus! — Boy!

[*Enter Alcæus, accompanied by an Ethiopian slave boy, and followed by Sappho, disguised as before, now carrying a spear. Alcæus, wreathed with grape leaves, is adorned fantastically as a Bacchanalian. The slave, likewise draped with vines, bears upon his head and shoulders a bulging wine-sack made of a skin. This (sinking upon one knee) he supports thus as upon a salver at Alcæus' side, and lifts to him, from beneath it, a shallow, black-figured drinking cup.*]

ALCÆUS

Here, here, thou sack-stool! Down,
And hold the pigskin for the bridegroom. Wait!

[*Addressing the cloaked figure of Sappho.*]

Hail, Larichus! hail, bridegroom home again!
To Dionysus I thy welcome pour. —
The cup! —

[*Filling it from the sack.*]

I charge thee, bird from Lydia,
When Atthis keeps thy house in Lesbos, plant
No other tree before the vine! And so
Sleep long and make your nest in grape-leaves.
Drink!
And so for song:

[*Singing.*]

Wine, dear child, and truth
And youth and these lips —

SAPPHO

[*Turning from the cup.*]

No wine for me.

ALCÆUS

No bride for Larichus!
For what is love but grape-juice? brides, but grapes?
And lovers — wine-skins! Look you on this sack
My caryatid here is holding — This
Whilome was pig and grunted in the bog
For water-nuts and mire: a sow's first-born
With bristles, Hyacinthus of the herd!

[*Pouring from the sack and drinking.*]

Behold him now — a vessel for us gods,
Swelling with Cyprian nectar. O translation!
Yet such a pig was Pittacus, who now
Swelleth with love of Sappho.—

[*Drinking.*]

Nay, but we —
Before we fell in love, were *we* not swine
Compared to this we are?

[*Patting the wine-sack.*]

I say, for one,
The Arcadians crunched acorns and no slander
To them; and as for me —

[*Singing.*]

O Ajax was a king, not I!
I fell by the kiss of the Cyprus-born —

And though Hebrus be the most plentiful of rivers yet 'tis said: from nothing,

[*Inverting his empty cup.*]

nothing cometh. More, boy!

SAPPHO

Where's Atthis?

ALCÆUS

Where's thy sister? Where's the song-dove?
Where's Sappho?

SAPPHO

[*Starting.*]

You've not answered me.

ALCÆUS

All's one!
I say, there lives a kind of four-wing'd Muse,
Quadruple-eyed and double-filleted,
Called indiscriminately Sappho — Atthis;
Find one, find both; for they be always arm
And neck together. Nay, but Larichus,
Patience and wait! As I am drunk, henceforth
I am thy brother: Sappho loveth me.

SAPPHO

Since when?

ALCÆUS

By Heracles, I know not: here
To-day upon this ground, she swooned all pale
Because another loved me; and she bade
Me meet her here to-night. — Good lad, thy hand
And blessing!

[*Sappho draws slightly away.*]

What!

SAPPHO

I wish you joy of her.

ALCÆUS

And not thy hand upon it?

SAPPHO

To be honest,
I cannot deem you happy.

ALCÆUS

With thy sister!

SAPPHO

These sisters are not all they seem to be.

ALCÆUS

But Sappho!

SAPPHO

I perhaps know her too well.

ALCÆUS

And doubt she loves me?

SAPPHO

Nay, far otherwise.
I doubt if ever she saw form of man,
Or maiden either, whom — being beautiful —
She hath not loved.

ALCÆUS

But not with passion —

SAPPHO

All
That breathes to her is passion; love itself
All-passionate.

ALCÆUS

Thou goadest me with thorns. —
This evening — Nay, why should I tell thee this?
And yet I will: — At sunset, here I saw
Thy sister speaking with a public slave.

SAPPHO

[*Withdrawing.*]

Ah!

ALCÆUS

If I thought — but I will tell thee more.
Here hung a net suspended, and they stood
Together, speaking low — I watched them yonder.
The slave was mending. Somehow he had got
One of his hands entangled in the mesh,
And she — I could not plainly watch her through
The net — methought she peered into his face.

SAPPHO

Ah!

ALCÆUS

So I left them.

SAPPHO

Did you stay to see
No more?

ALCÆUS

There was one with me.

SAPPHO

[*Quickly.*]

Who?

ALCÆUS

No matter.
But him — that slave! Sappho to speak with him
On the temple steps! — The thought hath maddened me.
Why art thou silent? Dost thou deem it nothing
That she should stoop to him?

SAPPHO

She could not stoop
To him.

ALCÆUS

By heaven! I'd have his vermin heart
Upon a spit and roast it — were it so;
But I am drunk to think it. — Boy, I pray you
When next you meet your sister, say no word
Of what I saw; but tactfully you might
Whisper some praises of me. Wait a little,
I'll run and find her.

[*To the wine-slave.*]

Come!

[*Calling back.*]

And Atthis too!
I'll tell her thou art waiting here to clasp
Her neck with Lydian pearls. Ho bride and groom!

[*Nabbing the slave-boy by the ear, he departs with him, singing.*]

Fetch me a Teian
Goblet of gold!
Life is a cubit,
Love is a span.

[*Exit.*]

SAPPHO

[*After a pause.*]

Soon shall the moon on the waters
Sleep, and the Pleiades; midnight
Come and the darkness be empty,
I in the silence — be waiting.
Phaon! Phaon! — where must I
Seek thee? Send me thine omen!

[*Remotely from the grove sounds the voice of Alcæus, singing.*]

ALCÆUS

Love me, drink with me, bloom with me, die, love!
Garlands for me are thine.
Mad when I am, share *thou* of my madness,
Wise, be thou wise with me.

[*From between the temple-tapestries appears Bion, the child. Running to the grove, he lifts from the ground a broken olive-bough, with lithe green shoots. These he strips of their leaves and twines, snake-like, round the main stem, which he flourishes blithely as a staff. Discovering then the tortoise-shell which lies near the steps, he runs to pick it up.*]

SAPPHO

[*Watching him.*]

At play — a luck-child! Here's my happy omen.

[*Taking the shell, Bion is about to return to the temple, when, seeing the cloaked Figure, he pauses and stares.*]

SAPPHO

Well, water-elf? Upon what dolphin's back
Or oily bladder rodest thou here to land?
Why dost thou pierce me with those sea-blue eyes,
As though they saw me in as guileless state
As thy small body is? Dost thou perchance
See through this manly corselet and suspect
This strutting Menelaus, that he wears
Within, a heart more coward-womanly
Than Paris? Stare not so, but answer me.
Ah, now I know thou art a water-boy,
For wave-sprites all are dumb to mortals, speak
Only to mermaids and to weedy Triton,
Their father. Come, what hast thou there?

[*The boy holds out the tortoise-shell and as, taking it, Sappho sits upon the altar steps (at the right), the child comes and stands near.*]

A shell!
A turtle's house! — and once upon a time —
Sprite, wilt thou hear a story?

[*The child nestles close.*]

Long ago
There lived another turtle, and he died
And left his shell-house empty by the waves,

And there a goddess bore a little boy
Named Hermes, and when he was four hours old
He was as tall as thou art,

[*Playfully twitching his branch of olive.*]

Nay, methinks
By thy caduceus, boy, thou shouldst be *he*,
And I that goddess. — Play, then! So he walked
Beside the waves and found the empty shell,
(Like this) and took a golden thorn —

[*Taking from under the helmet a hair-pin of gold.*]

like this,
And turned and turned the thorn — like this — and bored
Nine holes in either side, and drew through them
Nine strings —

[*Lifting the lyre which Alcæus left behind on the ground.*]

like these, and so he made the shell
To sing

[*Striking the lyre.*]

like this, and sitting in the spray
He sang with it a song — a song like this: —

[*Singing.*]

Hollow shell, horny shell,
Wake from slumber.
Long — too long — hast thou lain
Deaf and silent.

Where the pulse blooms in gold —
Moon- and sun-rise —
Thou didst creep slow and dumb,
Seeing nothing.

Yet above thee gleamed and swung
Star and swallow,
And around thee, lost in song,
Lovers mingled.

Horny shell, hear'st thou not
What I murmur?
Wake! my breath is on thee warm.
Wake! I touch thee.

[*Throwing away the lyre, Sappho starts up, and clasping the child close, speaks passionately.*]

Ah, little Hermes, pray for me! Thou only
Whose dumb child-cry the immortals hearken, go
And kneel to thy grandsire, the great Poseidon,
And tell him thou didst meet with a bright being,
Nor man nor woman, but a spirit both,
That bade thee intercede for him — for her,
That all the wild desire of this wild heart
May be to-night fulfilled. Pray him, through you,
To yield my love to me. Run, Hermes! — run!

[*The Child, with eyes of wonder, springs up the steps toward the temple. On the way, seeing the lyre lying where it has been thrown, he drops the tortoise-shell and, taking with him the lyre, runs into the temple. This Sappho, having turned away introspectively, does not perceive. From the olives now the voice of Atthis calls. — Entering, she rushes forward with outstretched arms.*]

ATTHIS

Larichus — Welcome home, my Larichus!

[*Shrinking back.*]

Ah me, what are you?

SAPPHO

[*With a smile.*]

Am I, then, so changed?

ATTHIS

Sappho! but thou art cruel. Where's thy brother?
Alcæus said he waited for me here.

SAPPHO

Myself am all thy lovers that are here.
Why do you sob?

ATTHIS

[*Throwing herself on the marble bench.*]

He never will return.

SAPPHO

[*Leaning over her.*]

I loved thee, Atthis, long and long ago,
Even when thou wert a slight and graceless child,
And should I let this soldier-brother come
And steal thee now away?

ATTHIS

He does not come.
Why have you done this to me? Why are you
Clad in his armour? Why have you deceived
Alcæus, and now me?

[*From the colonnade Anactoria enters, in moody revery.*]

SAPPHO

[*Indicates her to Atthis.*]

Come, ask of her.

[*Going toward the colonnade.*]

'Toria!

[*Atthis rises slowly, and looks after her.*]

ANACTORIA

[*Starting from her thoughts, looks in amazement.*]

Is it *you?*

SAPPHO

Have I not kept
My promise well?

ANACTORIA

But —

SAPPHO

He hath been here.

ANACTORIA

He!

SAPPHO

Alcæus: his love-lesson hath begun.
Did I not tell thee I would teach him well?
Leaving me now, he's gone to look for me,
And looking for his love, he is to find
You.

ANACTORIA

Me?

SAPPHO

There in the temple I have left
My violets. Go you and put them on
And come again.

[*On Anactoria's face slowly there dawns a light of passionate triumph.*]

ANACTORIA

[*Raising her clenched hands.*]

Oh! this is wonderful!

[*She turns and goes into the temple. Atthis comes wonderingly to Sappho.*]

ATTHIS

And is it for her sake you wear this garb?

SAPPHO

For her sake? No; not all; nor to rebuke
Alcæus, all. But there are motives, girl,
To guess which thou wouldst tremble, for thou art
What thou wert born — a soft bride to be wooed,
And 'Hymenæon!' was thy cradle song;
But I — Listen yonder!

[*Distantly the deep voices of men are heard, lifting a rude and intermittent chant, which soon recurs — wild and low — more near.*]

THE VOICES

Akoue, Poseidon!

SAPPHO

Upward from the shore
The men-slaves and the beach-folk now are bringing
Their offerings here to the sea-god, for
Fair weather on the morrow. — There perhaps
Among them, there among the dark sea-faces,
Ruddy with wine and passion, unaware
My lover walks — a dumb and dreamy slave
Yearning for liberation. *Therefore*, Atthis,
I have put on this garb, that as a man
I still may search those faces of the night
Till I shall peer within that bondman's eyes
And set his spirit free.

[*As Atthis, with a start of half comprehension, is about to speak.*]

Hush; do not guess,
But go now with thy servant to my house
And wait for Larichus. — Fear not for me.

[*Atthis kisses Sappho's hand and goes in awe.*]

[*Groups of sea-slaves now have begun to enter in the moonlight — rough, forbidding presences of rude physical power and superstition; some are wrapped in cloaks, others are almost naked, their sun-darkened flesh branded with symbols of their owners; all are bareheaded and without weapons. Bringing in their hands their sea-offerings, — shells, coral, kelp, and other simple tokens, — they place these on the top step before the temple, and moved vaguely — now some, now others — to utter*

their discontinuous chant, gather upon the steps and before the temple. Thus, for a minute or more, there transpires only pantomime. Upon the entrance of the slaves, Sappho at first turns instinctively away from them, and draws her cloak more closely about her. Yearningly, however, she turns back and moves among them — silent, searching. Now she joins a group of three that are drinking from a stone wine-jar, scans them, and turns elsewhere to one who is laying his gift of coral before the altar; from him too she turns and, touching a stooping form, peers wistfully an instant at the eyes upraised there to hers, then moves toward other forms obscure in the shadows.]

THE SEA-SLAVES

Iou, Poseidon!

[*At this cry of the slaves, the tapestry at the temple door parts, and there enters — clad in dark purple and green — the* PRIEST OF POSEIDON, *attended by two Acolytes* (*who gather up the offerings*). *The Priest raises his long trident staff, at which the slaves fall upon their faces, prostrating themselves with their low cry.*]

THE SEA-SLAVES

Chaire, Poseidon!

[*Sappho alone remains standing, at once wistful and imperious. The Priest motions toward her with his staff.*]

SAPPHO

Biddest thou me bow down, O Silent One?
Not with these abject children of the earth,
Nor to thy god. — Not to thy pitiless
God of the generations, pain and death,

Whom I defy! This day did I release
Out of his clutch a dove of sacrifice
Despite of him; and of these nameless slaves
Bow'd to his yoke, one — one will I set free
And lift as an immortal at my side
This night, in scorn of thee and thy Poseidon.
Put back thy trident: that is powerless
To sway me, for unseen the deathless birds
Of Aphrodite ward me with their wings
Inviolably free, and passionate
To dare. Thy god is not my god; thy law
Is not my law.

[*Turning from the temple and the priest — who remains impassive, majestically mute — Sappho, pursuing her search among the dark forms, passes quickly from the scene* (*right*).

[*As she goes, one of the prostrate slaves on the temple steps, who has partly raised himself during her speech, rises now alone and gazes after her. It is Phaon. Standing erect among the bowed forms of his fellow-slaves, he moves a few steps toward the place of Sappho's departure, and pauses. The trident of the Priest touches his shoulder, but he does not feel it. The other slaves rise menacingly and, muttering, are about to force him prostrate before the Priest, when the latter intervenes and motions them away. They depart slowly, uttering their chant; the Priest and Acolytes reënter the temple. All this Phaon neither heeds nor sees. Left alone, he stands gazing still where Sappho has departed — in his face the struggle of an awaking consciousness.*

[*Outside from the colonnade, some one whistles. The sound is repeated. Phaon turns absently and looks back.*]

ALCÆUS

[*Outside.*]

Here, water-dog!
Stand where thou art.

[*Entering.*]

Where art thou skulking, cur?

PHAON

[*Bending.*]

What would you, lord?

ALCÆUS

What makest at this hour
Here by the holy temple?

PHAON

Seeking, lord.

ALCÆUS

What, charity? A meal of maggots? Some
Goat's entrails by the altar? What wast seeking?

PHAON

[*Slowly.*]

A dream.

ALCÆUS

[*Bursting into shrill laughter.*]

Ha — ha, Apollo! my Apollo!
Behold thy Trojan Kalchas lives again,
Born of a Lesbian sea-bitch! Lo, a dog

Hath sniffed thine altar and become a seer
And prophet! Come, my dream-seeker, canst read
The flight of birds? Look there — those moonlit
doves —
What mean their dreamy circlings? Prophesy!

PHAON

[*Looking over the dim sea, where for a moment a flutter of doves is visible, shrinks back superstitiously.*]

Death.

ALCÆUS

[*His shrill derision checked by a sudden awe.*]

Here's enough of this. I, too, am seeking.
The lady Sappho spoke with thee to-day —
Answer me, churl: what said she?

PHAON

[*Slowly straightening to his erect stature.*]

She will tell.

ALCÆUS

So shalt thou, scavenger;
And if thou'd 'scape the knot-whip,
Speak quickly.

PHAON

I have spoken.

ALCÆUS

[*About to burst into passion, pauses and squints maliciously.*]

Oho, an avaricious
Lick-bones!

[*Taking from a pouch, hands to Phaon a coin.*]

An itching mongrel!
Here, hound; here's for thy mange.
Speak; we'll not tell the lady.

[*Phaon, looking from the coin in his hand to Alcæus' face, silently tosses the coin over the cliff. Alcæus starts passionately.*]

Slave, thou shalt have the rack
For this; I'll have thy master
Flay thee.

PHAON

I have no master.
I am a public slave;
The city owns me.

ALCÆUS

[*Seizing the spear which Sappho has left behind, strikes with it at Phaon.*]

Let
The city burn thy carcass.

PHAON

[*Wresting from him the spear.*]

Lord, you have drunk too deep.

ALCÆUS

Boy — Iacchus! Ho, boy! here!

[*Enter the Ethiopian slave-boy.*]

My guards! run to my garden
And fetch them thither. — Run!

[*Exit the slave.*]

By heaven, it grows now plainer
Why Sappho hath not met me:
She hath prepared a feast
Of tidbits for a sea-dog,
And keeps her chamber.

PHAON

She
Is not at home.

ALCÆUS

So *thou*
Hast sought her there!

PHAON

I left
Lately her house.

[*Reënter Sappho, now without her helmet — her dark locks falling about her breastplate in the moonlight. She stands unobserved, intense, watching the two.*]

ALCÆUS

'Twas so, then!
Her brother said so. Faugh!
Faugh! how the mad night reeks it!
A slave! — O Larichus,
Thou spakest well: These sisters
Are not all that they seem!
But she — the Muse! — to turn
Circe, and set her meshes
To catch a water-rat —
A public, prowling slave!

PHAON

No more!

ALCÆUS

But this is Lesbos,
Where all are lovers! This
Will sing most musically
Set to the lyre: how Sappho,
Enamour'd of the sea-god,
Invoked the slime, to yield
As substitute —

PHAON

[*Approaching near.*]
No more!

ALCÆUS

A wharf-rat for her lover.

PHAON

[*Bursting his culminated self-control, strikes with clenched hand Alcæus to the ground, where he lies his length, unconscious, at the foot of the steps. Ignoring him there, Phaon lifts his face with an exultant, dreamy smile, speaking low.*]

Lord, the stars!
Thy stars again! how glorious they burn!

SAPPHO

[*Coming forward.*]

At last!

PHAON

[*Gazing in her face.*]

Still they are burning there.

SAPPHO

At last
Thy hand is lifted and thy blow is fallen.
Look! at thy feet he bows, alive and prone
From his proud pedestal: this lord of lords.
Ha, Aphrodite! in this man of men
How I have triumphed!

PHAON

Are you not the same
That stood amidst us, with thy helmet plume,
And scorned the silent god?

SAPPHO

Wert thou so near
And yet I found thee not?

PHAON

Your spirit found me;
Its voice awoke me 'mongst the herded slaves
And bade me rise towards you, for it said —
'One — one will I set free.'

SAPPHO

That slave is freed!
There lies his bondage stricken in the dust
By his own hand.

PHAON

[*Bewildered.*]
My hand?

SAPPHO

Was it not thine
That felled him yonder? Was it not thy soul
That to his mockery cried out "No more!"
And smote him mute?

PHAON

Thou sayest it was I:
Speak on! — Even so thou spakest by the net.

SAPPHO

Canst thou then name me?

PHAON

Sappho.

SAPPHO

Hush; he breathes
Less hard; come hither.

[*They move away to the right.*]

All the waning time
Of all the stars have I kept watch for thee.

PHAON

And I have groped in darkness — toward thine eyes.

SAPPHO

Who shall constrain Apollo 'neath the sea
When he uplifts his glad brow from the fens
Aspiring to inevitable noon?
Who shall constrain Phaon a slave?

PHAON

Speak still!

SAPPHO

Out of thy dim fens hath thy godhead dawned
Insufferably fair. O Phaon, that
Which thou hast struck already from thy soul
I loose now from thy body.

[*With the key of Pittacus, Sappho unfastens the bronze yoke-ring from the neck of Phaon, and takes it from him in her hand.*]

Know you this?

PHAON

My name-ring 'tis.

SAPPHO

[*Reads from the characters in the metal.*]

'Phaon of Lesbos — slave.'

PHAON

[*Pressing his hand to his throat.*]

How light! — how light and strange! Methought it was
Even myself, a part of me.

SAPPHO

Hear how it falls now — a dead thing
Back to the dust.

[*She drops the bronze ring, which falls with a muffled sound to the earth. Watching this, Alcæus, who from his swoon has awakened and listened with fierce self-restraint, now, unobserved, crawls on the ground to within reach of the ring, secures it, and returns silently, while Sappho continues speaking to Phaon.*]

Never shalt thou, cramped again in thy sea-sleep,
Wake at its twinge in thy sinews; never again in the noon-glare
Feel it scorch in thy flesh familiar shame, nor at bitter
Sundown, numbly, in winter, lay on thy drowsy blood its
Ache long accustomed.

PHAON

The clutch hath loosened; the fingers of bronze are
Loosened.

SAPPHO

And with them the yoke of contumely, scorn and the callous
Scar of the drift-wood.

PHAON

What breath filleth my body with fire?
What is the voice of this cloud that speaketh in flame to me?

SAPPHO

Hear it!
Phaon of Lesbos is dead.

PHAON

Ah!

SAPPHO

Phaon of Hellas is risen!
Phaon of all the Æolian isles — of the ages that will be
Unto the Autumn of time: Phaon, the freedman of Sappho.

ALCÆUS

[*Faintly from where he lies.*]

Larichus!

[*There is a moment of silence, without motion. Slowly then Sappho points to her spear on the ground, speaking to Phaon.*]

SAPPHO

To my service, bondslave: bear
My spear for me.

PHAON

[*Lifting the spear, precedes Sappho, as she moves to go.*]

Forever!

[*Exit right.*]

ALCÆUS

[*Half raising himself.*]

Larichus!

SAPPHO

[*Pausing.*]

Who speaks to me?

ALCÆUS

[*Rising.*]

A liar, for he names
You Larichus: a liar and a dupe
Of yours.

SAPPHO

Alcæus, you have listened — heard?

ALCÆUS

Laughter from high Olympus have I heard :
'Sappho the Rat-catcher hath speared her quarry!'
Cries blithe Terpsichore. — You shall not go ;
You shall not, till you hear me.

[*Sappho, who has started away, pauses again in serene contempt, and looks full at Alcæus.*]

SAPPHO

Well?

ALCÆUS

Forgive
The wine-god for my words. But that is past
And I am bitter earnest. — Men are born,
Not made ; and what is bred is bred in soul
And brain more deep than sinews.

SAPPHO

Well?

ALCÆUS

A slave
Shall always be a slave. No yoke of bronze
Cast off can liberate him.

SAPPHO

Yet a slave
Could bid Alcæus bow and eat the earth
Even at his feet.

ALCÆUS

Beware! I love you.

SAPPHO

I

Love Phaon.

ALCÆUS

He —

SAPPHO

[*Bitingly.*]

'Can I constrain a god?
Tether him? Clip his wings? Say *come* or *go?*
Love is a voyager' — or hath this Love
Changed, since you scoffed at Anactoria?

ALCÆUS

You have upraised him, not himself; and he
Shall fall more basely from your height.

SAPPHO

Oh, I

Am sure of him as of this liberal air
I breathe. [*Reaching upward her arms.*]
This will not ever fail, nor Phaon.

ALCÆUS

[*Fiercely, staying her as she goes again.*]

Keep from him yet. One knowledge
I will not spare you now.
Look down: There in the caverns
Of sea-weed and the slime-ooze,
The tide creatures and reptiles
Seek in the dark their mates
And spawn their generations.

SAPPHO

[*Drawing back.*]

The Spring is universal.

ALCÆUS

Even as the Autumn.

[*Pointing below.*]

He

Is one of those. His mate
And brood are there. — Ha, Sappho!
You did not know.

SAPPHO

[*Dreamily.*]

I knew.

ALCÆUS

You knew that Phaon —

SAPPHO

Was he not a slave,
And now — no more?

ALCÆUS

Impossible! Art thou
Sappho of Mitylene?

SAPPHO

Do you dream
I am *not* she? or have you never known
Sappho?

ALCÆUS

You are gone blind with passion.

SAPPHO

Blind!
Have you beheld through the obscuring world
The Beautiful? There comes a day, Alcæus,
When one of us, that for a million years
Have gendered in the sun, looks upward in
His face, and in the features there discerns
Our own divinity. I am that one;
And so the stumbling and unconscious ways
Of nature are no longer mine: her currents,
Self-foiled, obstructed, clogged, I sway to sure
And passionate direction. Thenceforth I
Am pilgrim and not pathway: destiny
I am, no more the clay of destiny.

ALCÆUS

But Phaon —

SAPPHO

Have you felt the maker's joy
Who out of clay sculptures Hyperion,
Or out of silence shapes heart-moving song? —
That is my joy of Phaon.

ALCÆUS

You are fooled;
Yourself are Nature's bondmaid.

SAPPHO

Little minds
Muddy with resolution. — Go your ways,
Alcæus, for I go now to my lover:
Yea, knowing all *thy* knowledge do I go,
And on his liberated soul I stake
My hope — my life.

[*Exit right.*]

ALCÆUS

[*Springing after her, then pausing.*]

Sappho! — Ah, Muse of Vengeance!
A medicine — a medicine for this!

[*Lifting in his hand the bronze yoke, he reads.*]

'Phaon of Lesbos — slave.'

[*As he stands thus desperately intent, Anactoria enters from the temple, wearing the violet-wreath of Sappho. She walks direct to him and looks silently in his face, with fierce pride and yearning. At her presence, he starts and smiles faintly.*]

Her violets!

ANACTORIA

She sent them to you — so.

ALCÆUS

[*His look turning back from her to the yoke of bronze.*]

Put them away
From you.

ANACTORIA

To one who hath herself been put
Away, they should be fitting.

ALCÆUS

[*Watching some one approach.*]

Pittacus!

[*Enter in meditation Pittacus. Alcæus — his face lighting with sudden exultation — turns to his companion with a gesture of passionate deference.*]

Incomparable Anactoria,
Beloved! all those damnèd subtle chains
Of Sappho thou hast struck away. Once more
My vows and I are thine. — Hail, Pittacus!
Your boon and blessing! A betrothal boon
On us, two foolish lovers reconciled.

ANACTORIA

[*Utterly bewildered.*]

Alcæus!

PITTACUS

You and Anactoria!

ALCÆUS

Will you deny true love its whims, and heap
Embarrassment on her, who trembles there?
Enough she chooses me, your rival once
And now your craving friend. 'Twas you who said
'Forgiveness better is than punishment.'
Therefore a boon, to prove it!

PITTACUS

What have I
Would please you?

ALCÆUS

A mere nothing, yet my heart
Is set upon it. You, my lord, are Tyrant
Of Mitylene, and as such 'tis you
Who own the public slaves. — A lover's whim,
My lord! — You will remember how to-day
You struck one of these slaves — a fellow passing
With drift-wood.

PITTACUS

Yes.

ALCÆUS

The blame was mine. I can't
Forget his face. By heaven, I will requite
That fellow. I would have him feel to-night
As glad as I am. Sir — a foolish boon!
Give him to me to be my body-slave.

ANACTORIA

No, no!

ALCÆUS

[*Reaching his arm toward her.*]

Dear love!

PITTACUS

How deep is wine — and truth!
This spinning world, 'tis but a street-boy's top,
And each must whip his own.

[*Passing on.*]

The slave is yours.

ANACTORIA

[*Starting after.*]

You do not understand.

ALCÆUS

[*Staying her.*]

'Tis you, sweet girl,
Who have not guessed my purpose.

ANACTORIA

[*Trembling.*]

Tell me.

PITTACUS

[*From the colonnade.*]

Friends,
If you shall chance to meet with Sappho, say
That Pittacus, her friend, hath sailed for Sparta.

[*Exit.*]

ANACTORIA

[*Feverishly.*]

What would you do with Phaon?

ALCÆUS

[*Kissing her hand, which she withdraws.*]

Can't you guess?
Love, I have purchased him to wait on you
In public, when the girl-disciples meet
And Sappho leads the singing.

ANACTORIA

[*Gazing at him, fascinated.*]

Horrible!

ALCÆUS

And at the festivals, amid the mirth
And fluttered laughter of the maidens, Phaon
Shall bear the wine-sack in, and pass the cakes
To Sappho, where she sits beside you. — Come;
Yonder's my black knave Iacchus. He is running
Up from my garden. We'll go meet him.

ANACTORIA

[*Following impotent.*]

Why?

ALCÆUS

[*Seizing her arm and raising the yoke-ring in his other hand.*]

Why do the robins fly to meet the spring?

[*Exeunt, left.*]

[*Enter, right, Sappho and Phaon. Each has a hand upon the horizontal spear between them, and — until Sappho releases — they speak across it, lifting or lowering it in their mutual persuasion.*]

SAPPHO

'Tis mine.

PHAON

'Tis mine.

SAPPHO

You must not bear it more
In servitude.

PHAON

[*Pleadingly.*]

In service now!

SAPPHO

Even now?
Yielded so soon, and all my victory
Reversed? — Nay, be it mine in the pursuit,
For I have been your huntress.

PHAON

Him you sought
You have transformed. O Spirit, Woman,
Whatso you are, the war-cry of your love
Shouts in my blood and tingles in my brain
For action and for freedom and for life.
Let me go armed to-night — your conqueror.
Into my hands — the spear!

SAPPHO

A little while
Be conquered yet; a little breathing-space
Fear me — lest I shall fear.

PHAON

For what?

SAPPHO

You are
Awakened to me from your torpid lair
So newly masterful. My sudden wound
Of liberty hath quickened into power
Till now, imperious, you turn at bay
And wrestle with me.

PHAON

[*Smiling.*]
Yield, then.

SAPPHO

O not yet!
Still let me be Diana — thou, my stag,
And through the April uplands of the world
Flee on, on, burning backward with thine eyes,
And I forever kindled.

PHAON

Not that free
And lordly animal —

[*Setting his foot upon Bion's tortoise-shell beside him.*]

Look there, the thing
Which you awakened into ecstasy
Of being — me, this soul you gaze upon.

SAPPHO

[*Looking from the shell to Phaon's face.*]

My playmate Hermes — grown to manhood : even
So might he glance and smile.

PHAON

Hermes — what's he ?

SAPPHO

A little child I love. — My Phaon, share
This weapon with me. Make not of me yet
A woman only. Comrades let us be,
Or children bargaining their captaincy —
Agamemnon and his brother, hand in hand
Against the Trojans.

PHAON

Childhood never trafficked
Rapture like yours. You would not what you ask.
[*Lifting high the spear, to which Sappho's hand still clings.*]
Relinquish !

SAPPHO

Not — playfellow ?

PHAON

No.

SAPPHO

[*Releases her grasp, half fearfully.*]

My peer, then !

PHAON

No, but your lord and lover! Nevermore
Shall you be sovereign of your maiden will
Or single in your fate. Not here with priest
And song, but with a spear, you have betrothed me.

[*Raising the weapon above him, and smiling up at it.*]

O thou my spear, thou singest in my hand.
Thou art my power and manhood. Face to face
Thou pittest me in combat with the gods,
And raising thee, my mind is raisèd up
Confronting heaven, till from those clouds of fire
This slavish world grows dim, and all that sways it —
The tyrant's hate, the galley-master's goad,
The sordid trader's dreams of avarice —
Dwindle to impotence. Thine is the war
Which shall not end with time — war with those gods
That made men's misery.

[*To Sappho.*]

Belovèd, know
What you have quickened, and if you would hear
The chant of life my lips can never sing,
Hark, hark now to the hymning of this steel!

[*From the cliff he hurls the spear into the night.*]

There flies the first: ten thousand will I fling
Because of you.

SAPPHO

[*Going to his arms.*]

My lover!

[*Then, as Phaon embraces her, she draws back wistful, and peers in the moonlight after the fallen spear.*]

If its dart,
Falling, should strike a dove!

PHAON

Turn not away.
Where are your thoughts deep wandered in the night,
Or what, love, do they hear?

[*Where they stand silent, from below the faint roar of the surf and a far love-song are dreamily distinguishable.*]

SAPPHO

[*Turning to him.*]

'The chant of life!'
Listen! Your lifted spear hath been a signal
For that world-music. Even as the master
Lifteth his staff and all the temple-choir
Raise their clear chanting,
So hath it waked those wild-sweet ocean murmurs
Yonder — Thou hearest with me! — where the crickets
Melt with that human lover and the night-bird
Over Mitylene.

PHAON

These are but thou; and thoughts of thee are music.

SAPPHO

Nay, but *look* also! On the glassy sea-floor,
White as the moonbeam, how it rises ghostly
There!

PHAON

'Tis a fog-bank.

SAPPHO

Yes, but the cloud is carved: against the night sky,
Trembling, it lifts the pearl horns of a lyre
Curved, and a hand that holds a mighty plectron
Plays to Orion!

PHAON

Nay, 'tis a ship I see: her prow is curving
Up from the cloudy billows, and her captain,
Standing upon it, where the bending oarsmen
Churn the bright star-foam,
Points to the world beneath them — all its kingdoms
Kindling with men, and to his one companion
Speaks in the silence: 'All this will I conquer,
Sappho!'

SAPPHO

My master!

[*Enter, from the colonnade, Anactoria.*]

ANACTORIA

[*Wildly.*]

He is coming: go! Go in the temple!

SAPPHO

Who
Is coming, 'Toria?

ANACTORIA

Alcæus! Oh,
Mad was I for his love, and blind with dread
Of you. I did not dream his horrible
Vengeance. Go in the temple.

SAPPHO

Why?

ANACTORIA

In there
Is sanctuary.
[*To Phaon.*]
He can take thee not.

PHAON

Take *me?*

ANACTORIA

Thou art his body-slave, his flesh,
His chattels. Pittacus hath granted him
Thee and thy freedom. He is coming now
To seize thee.

PHAON

[*As Sappho, with a cry, goes to him.*]
I will greet him.

ANACTORIA

Nay, he brings
His guards — two score of spearmen.

SAPPHO

[*To Phaon.*]

Come with me;
My house will shelter us.

ANACTORIA

You cannot leave;
The ways are held, his men surround this place.

SAPPHO

[*Tensely.*]

Is there no path unknown to them?

PHAON

This one.

SAPPHO

The cliff-path, ah! Quick, Phaon: we will go
Here.

PHAON

You would dare this with me?

SAPPHO

Am I not
Yours?

PHAON

You will go?

SAPPHO

Even to the underworld!

PHAON

Against the Tyrant's will?

SAPPHO

Against the gods'.

PHAON

[*Moves with swift decision.*]

Come, then; my boat is there.

ANACTORIA

[*Imploringly, to Sappho.*]

Stay! — there is death.
Your brother is returned. Stay in the temple
Till I can bring him here.

SAPPHO

Not Larichus.
At dawn he brings his bride. They must not know
This thing.

[*Imperiously.*]

Go: keep it from them — for my sake.

ANACTORIA

[*Goes.*]

For thy sake would that I had killed myself!

[*Exit, left.*]

SAPPHO

[*To Phaon.*]

Look there: what gleams among the olives?

PHAON

Spears.

They are coming.

SAPPHO

[*In dread, protectingly.*]

Phaon!

PHAON

See, the path falls sheer

Into the wave — my arms your only staff.

[*Swinging from the cliff, Phaon takes footing upon the jutted path below, his face and shoulder only visible as he reaches upward to Sappho's support.*]

Still do you dare?

SAPPHO

We must dare all to be

Ourselves. — Your arms, love! — Now to the world's end,

The islands of the Cyclops in the seas!

[*Sappho and Phaon disappear below the cliff. As they do so there is heard the low rattle of greaves and, emerging on the edges of the scene, the points of spear-heads glisten. Simultaneously, from the temple, comes forth Thalassa — her babe at her breast — followed by Bion, who carries in his hands the lyre.*]

THALASSA

[*Searching with her eyes.*]

He tarrieth long away —
Too long for the fever; yet
At last will he come to me.

[*Stooping in the shadow of the pillar, she sits on the lowest step leading to the shrine. There, while the little boy, in his garb of sea-weed, wanders in the moonlight, thrumming the strings of the lyre with low, monotonous cadence, Thalassa clutches her babe close, and swaying her body with a strange rhythm, suckles the fever-stricken child. From there, as she sings, her voice floats mournfully in the night.*]

Hesper, Hesper,
Eleleu!
Lord of evening, thou that bringest
All that lovely Morning scattered —
Eleleu! Eleleu!
Lord, the sheep, the goat thou bringest,
The child to its mother.
Eleleu!

[*Slowly the Herculaneum curtain shuts off the scene.*]

Here follows the Pantomime of the Second Interlude.

Vide Appendix.

ACT III

ACT III

Earliest daybreak is beginning to struggle faintly with the light of the low moon, muffled now by masses of slowly indrifting fog from the sea, in the background. Against this, stand out vaguely the outlines of the temple, uncertain shadows of which are cast upon the fog by the glow of the still blazing urn. Beside this urn, white-haired, clad in his dark-flowing purple and green, stands the Priest of Poseidon, replenishing it with fagots. All is silent, and the last of the swinging lamps in the olive grove flickers out.

As the Priest, leaning wearily on his trident-staff, moves slowly from the urn, there enters to him, from the temple, Phaon. About him is thrown a rough fisher's cloak. He greets the Priest in a low voice and points back to the temple.

PHAON

Father, she rests; the holy vestals fetch her there
Garments and warmth.—Ah, blessèd was thy beacon! Calm
All night it gazed upon us like a parent's eye
Guiding us home to refuge, when the lamps of heaven
Themselves were swallowed up with black, insufferable
Fog. Father, speak! What is this portent? And this pang

Of cold and clutching cloud — what meaneth it, that never
Since I was child, can I remember like to this?
Yet first methought I dreamed it: all last evening
Darkly it hung with mist my mind; but now that fog,
Which rolled and gathered in imagination, look!
This air and actual world are palled and numb with it.
Oh, if this thing be more than earthly, tell!

[*The Priest turns away.*]

Forgive,
I had forgot thy vow of silence to the god.
Yet answer me in sign: is it Poseidon's anger?

[*The Priest nods assent.*]

Yet wherefore is he angry? Hath some mortal broken
His law?

[*The Priest, nodding once more assent, moves past Phaon.*]

Stay, father! — Who? Who hath offended him?

[*The Priest gazes sadly into Phaon's face, then, giving no further sign, passes iuto the temple. Phaon starts, with a low cry of fear.*]

Ah me, Poseidon, lord! *I* have offended thee.

[*Going to the altar, Phaon prostrates himself to the earth and remains there, bowed. After a brief pause enter from the temple Sappho, clad in the white garment of a vestal. Seeing Phaon, she comes down furtively and stands beside him. For a moment Phaon does not see her. Then as with a shiver she touches his shoulder, he leaps up beside her, ardent.*]

Once more!

[*Pausing, he draws back in awe.*]

How art thou changed! Scarce would I dream
'Tis thou.

SAPPHO

The virgins they have clothed me.

PHAON

Why
Have you come forth into the cold?

SAPPHO

How long
Until the day?

PHAON

Already it grows dawn;
Were it clear, the cedars would be burning black
Along the yellow hill-sky. You are chilled:
Still you are trembling from the sea-damp. — Here!

[*Taking his cloak from his shoulders, he throws it about her.*]

SAPPHO

It may be that; it may be so.

PHAON

Come in
And warm thee.

SAPPHO

Phaon, no; 'tis not the night
Hath deadened so my heart; hardly it beats.
'Tis not the chill, the faintness and the fog.

PHAON

What is it, Sappho?

SAPPHO

[*Turning to him, impetuous.*]

Ah! why are we here?
Wherefore have you returned and brought me back?
Why are we not still there — out there alone
Together in thy little groping boat,
Lost, rudderless, amid the unimagin'd
Glooms of the gray Ægean! Over us —
No wider than the space betwixt our faces —
The fog had built a tent, and shut away
Sky, shore, and men and temples, yet our eyes
Had lighted there an inward universe
More vast, wherein our hearts stood still, and breathed
The awful passion of the breathing tide.
Ah, why did you turn back?

PHAON

[*Hesitant.*]

You would have perished;
Twice in my arms you fainted with the cold.

SAPPHO

Not with the cold — with ecstasy of fire!

PHAON

[*Uneasily, veiling his deeper reason.*]

This holy beacon gleamed our only sign
Of haven; 'twas the god who summoned us. —
Food, warmth, and life were here for you.

SAPPHO

And fear!

Portent and fear.

PHAON

What fear?

SAPPHO

Unspeakable!

[*To herself.*]

Whilst we returned, methought I heard again
The croon of that eternal cradle-song,
And — all of mist — the awful Mother rose,
Outreaching on the air her vacant arms.

[*Wildly, to Phaon.*]

O better to have died together there
Than here — to separate.

PHAON

That will not be.

SAPPHO

Phaon, *they* will find you here. Come to the boat
Once more.

[*Taking hold of him as to go.*]

Come back with me.

PHAON

[*Putting her hand away.*]

You know not yet
The mightiest cause of my return.

SAPPHO

The fog,
You said. But see — the dawn! The fog will lift.

PHAON

The fog will never lift — if we go yet.

SAPPHO

What do you mean?

PHAON

[*His face taking on a look of superstitious fear, his body — slowly — a slave-like bearing, he half whispers mysteriously.*]

Sappho, I know the fog;
Since boyhood I have known. *This* is not fog.
This is the wrath and darkness of the god:
I have offended him.

SAPPHO

Look not like that!

PHAON

The dove I should have killed for him — it lives;
You took it from me, but it was Poseidon's.
Therefore I have returned to appease his anger.

SAPPHO

Phaon, drift not away! In pity of
Our love, drift not away.

PHAON

This will not lift
Till I have sacrificed.
[*Going.*]
Wait but a little
And I will find a victim.

SAPPHO

[*With imperious appeal.*]
Do you say
This — you, that for our liberty defied
With me fate and the gods?

PHAON

That blasphemy
Hath raised this cloud. The sea-god demands death,
And I must sacrifice.

SAPPHO

Stoop not to this!
Our wills are their own Providence, and shape
The mandates of the immortals to their ends.

PHAON

Wait: I will not be long.

SAPPHO

[*Following.*]

It must not be.
Phaon, this thought itself is bondage. Think:
To you I yielded as my guiding star,
And now if you shall fall, our heaven and we
Shall have one darkness. Be once more thyself —
Master of life.

[*From off the scene, left, is heard the low thrumming of a stringed instrument. Phaon stops to listen.*]

PHAON

What sound is that?

SAPPHO

[*After a pause.*]

Alcæus,
His lyre it is; the tone of it I know. —
Come back, or he will seize you. Phaon!

PHAON

[*Raising his clasped hands, exultant.*]

Lord!
Thy victim! Thou hast sent him to my hands.

SAPPHO

You know him not: his guards are with him there
To do his vengeance. He will violate
The temple in the dark, and murder you.

[*Phaon hastens to the altar.*]

What would you do?

PHAON

[*Seizing the knife of ritual.*]

He comes for sacrifice;
The god, not I, hath summoned him.

[*Calling into the mist.*]

Alcæus!

SAPPHO

[*Imploring.*]

Phaon, be silent.

PHAON

[*Mounting the steps toward the colonnade.*]

Mockest thou me, Alcæus?
Makest thou me thy slave to tinkling strings
And thrum of music?

SAPPHO

[*Clinging to him.*]

Hush.

PHAON

[*Putting her away.*]

Come, take me; here
Am I.

SAPPHO

[*Numbly.*]

The star is fallen.

PHAON

[*To Sappho.*]

Fear no more;
I have but drawn him on. Now will I be
Silent — and sure.

[*Crouching behind the second pillar, he holds the long knife drawn and, waiting, murmurs to Sappho, who stands pale and spellbound.*]

Soon shall the fog be lifted.

[*The low thrumming sounds draw near and nearer, along the colonnade, until suddenly Phaon, listening, springs forward and strikes blindly behind the pillar in the obscurity.*]

Thy blood upon me!

[*He leaps back.*]

A CHILD'S VOICE

[*Cries in the dimness.*]

Babbo!

[*From behind the pillar, Bion, the child, with arms outstretched to Phaon, staggers forward and falls, dropping from his hands a lyre. Phaon, staring for an instant, turns away his face toward Sappho, and points to the earth behind him.*]

PHAON

What is there?

SAPPHO

[*Kneeling, raises the lyre and looks upon the boy.*]

The lyre I played. Ah, little Hermes, thou!
Lift up thy head, my luck-boy. 'Tis thy friend, dear,
The goddess.

PHAON

[*Turning superstitiously.*]

Ha!

SAPPHO

The blood! His heart's still.

[*Rising fiercely toward Phaon.*] You
Have murdered him — my elf, my intercessor!
Blindly you struck this blow in your own darkness
And killed him — innocent. Look! I accuse you!
His blood is on you.

PHAON

[*Who has looked, speechless, upon the body, sinks upon his knees beside it.*]

Bion, my son!

SAPPHO

[*Shrinking back.*] His father!

[*There is an utter silence. Sappho, gazing at the two, murmurs to herself in awe.*]

And if the dove had died, the child had lived.

[*With impulsive tenderness, she moves to speak to Phaon, but over his bowed form, her utterance fails. At last she half whispers to him.*]

Phaon, I did not know. — Phaon!

PHAON

[*Oblivious, touches the child's tumbled hair.*]

Shalt grow
No taller now among the iris-reeds.

SAPPHO

Mine is this deed, not yours. My sorrow shall
Be ransom for you.

PHAON

[*Rises slowly.*]

What hast *thou* for me?
Thou which hast taken him! — *O moi!* Thalassa!

[*He rushes into the temple.*]

SAPPHO

[*Wildly, following him.*]

No, no — not her! Not now to her!

[*From off the scene, left, is heard a low crooning sound — the voice of Thalassa.*]

THALASSA

Eleu!

[*Sappho, at the temple door, pauses, clutching the tapestry.*]

Where art thou, my Bion? Dim
The way is; I hear thy shell
No more; strike it louder.

[*Thalassa enters, bearing in her arms the babe.*]

Didst
Thou meet with thy Babbo? We
Have followed thy music far,
Yet nowhere we found him in
The night. Speak: where art thou? — Ah,
Thou'st wearied, and laid thee down
Asleep.

SAPPHO

[*Stepping forward, with compassion, intercepts Thalassa's gaze from the body.*]

Come no nearer. Go
In peace.

THALASSA

The bright lady!

[*Starting toward Sappho, she holds out to her the swaddled babe.*]

Feel,
'Tis cold now: will drink no more
Its mother's milk.

[*Taking from her bosom the dolphin-bracelet.*]

Look, 'tis here —
Thine arm-ring, the shining curse
Thou gavest to Phaon; take
The gold thing! Ah, take it back
That so may my little one
Be warm now, and drink again.

SAPPHO

[*Trembling.*]

'Tis cold?

THALASSA

[*Fiercely.*]

Nay, shalt touch it not!
'Tis mine, mine! Take thou the gold
And give me its smile again.

SAPPHO

[*Slowly taking the bracelet from Thalassa, peers at the infant's face and draws away.*]

Ah me!

THALASSA

[*Looking from Sappho to the child with an eager hope.*]

Thou hast ta'en it back
At last! Still why keepest thou
The warmth of it? Mine it is —
Not thine — the babe. Give it me
In my arm alive!

SAPPHO

[*Anguished, turns upon Thalassa.*]

What am I
To thee? Or what art thou
Or this to me? — Not I,
Not I it was who chilled its little heart.
I say it was not I.

[*Thalassa, heedless and unhearing, watches only the child's face, while from her own the light of hope goes slowly out.*]

Phaon I took from thee,
Phaon I freed, because his soul is mine
And mine his own; and these —
These little lifeless ones — I would have given
Joy of their days; but now
This double bolt from heaven, this aimless death
Hath snatched them, as the lightning slayeth the sheep. —
O say not it was I!

THALASSA

It stirs not; it nestles not.
Perchance yet the sacrifice
Shall make it to breathe again.

[*Moving toward the temple.*]

Its father will know. —

SAPPHO

[*Placing herself in her path.*]

Not there!
Go to thy kin on the beaches,
Bearing thy sorrow. Go quickly
Lest it shall be too late.

THALASSA

[*Smiling wanly, murmurs to the infant.*]

Nestling!

SAPPHO

Hear me! I plead to you. Passionate
Slave imperturbable! Sibyl —
Sphynx of maternity! Hear me
Now; I am humble.

THALASSA

Eleu!
Nine moons was I blithe of it,
Awaiting the cry of it;
Ah, glad was the glimpse of it
And soft were the fingers; warm
It clung to me.

SAPPHO

[*Terribly.*]

Leave me: I fear you.
You, of all beings, alone I
Fear. On the waters I feared you.
Even as he rowed us to freedom,
Out of the drip of his oars, you
Sang to him. Out of the fog-bank,
Fog-born, the fate of you rose, and
Drew us to shore again. But though,
Sibyl, I feared you, yet now I
Challenge. Not so shall that vision
Blast, which I witnessed with Phaon
Here — No, not so shall the coil of
Circumstance strangle us! *I*, not
You, am his destiny. — Prove us!

[*Reënter Phaon from the temple.*]

THALASSA

[*Going to him.*]

Look, Babbo: 'tis gone away,
Hath left my arms.

PHAON

[*Looking on the infant.*]

Both!

[*Gazing away to the sea.*]

The night
Is lifting now.

THALASSA

Phaon, hast
Thou sacrificed?

PHAON

[*Pointing where Bion lies.*]

There: 'tis done.

THALASSA

[*Turning swiftly to the body, stoops near.*]

Poseidon! Poseidon! Ah!

[*Crouching over the body, she moans low and lays the infant beside it.*]

Io! io! Sleep with him.

[*She bows prostrate over the children.*]

PHAON

[*With sullen fierceness, slave-like, approaches Sappho.*]

Goddess, be merciful — thou that hast maddened me!
Thou that in longing
Infinite yearnest for life, be appeased now. For
thee — for thee this
Sacrifice! Look, we have made our offering. There
is our life-blood:
Warm is it still, and the opened hearts have yielded
their happy
Spirits to thee. Be appeased!

SAPPHO

Phaon, do you not know me?

PHAON

Long have I known thee — too long. First in my
boyhood I saw thee.
Thou from the awful immortals camest in storm, and
thy beauty
Blinded the day; and the slave-folk warned me, but
I would not heed their
Counsel. I loved thee. Ah, why — why now again
in thy vengeance
Hast thou returned here to curse me? Thou, not
Poseidon, hast spread these
Meshes of cloud to entangle me in this murder.

SAPPHO

[*Cries aloud.*]

No, Phaon!

PHAON

Kneel, Thalassa, bow down! Bow down to the Lady of Heaven;
Pray thou with me.

[*To Sappho.*]

O remove thy scourge from us, most wretched slaves.

THALASSA

[*Bowing down with Phaon before Sappho.*]

Bright Lady, give us our bairns again!

SAPPHO

Kneel not! No Lady of Heaven — Sappho am I, and a mortal wretched as ye are: a woman
Born from the pang of a mother like thee, Thalassa — a woman
Passionate, seeking the love of the man that loveth her. Phaon,
Phaon! Remember you not this place in the sunset, — the brightening
Moon on the Ægean, the falling cliff-path below us, the crying
Sea-birds — my hand on thy shoulder? I am Sappho — that Sappho!

PHAON

[*Dreamily.*]

Glorious there was your face as you leaned to me.

SAPPHO

Hast thou forgotten
How, with our hands on my spear between us, we wrestled for mastery
Here? — How you pleaded and, lordly, bade me relinquish, and conquered?

PHAON

Over your golden breastplate glooming, your hair like the tempest
Darkened.

SAPPHO

[*Moving gradually nearer the cliff, while Phaon follows — hesitant, fascinated.*]

You lifted it high — the spear — and gazed on it, raising
Upward your glowing mind to it, crying aloud 'gainst the heaven
War on the tyrant gods that make men's slavery.

PHAON

Starlight
Shone in your smile.

SAPPHO

How you towered, god-like yourself, — yea, as even
Now! — and the spear in your hand grew divine — a fiery symbol.

PHAON

Yours was that fire.

SAPPHO

Then you hurled it into the mystery — hurled it
Singing — and turned to me.

[*Exulting, as Phaon — ardent — reaches toward her.*]

So!

PHAON

Belovèd!

SAPPHO

Thou art restored to me!

[*Springing to the cliff-path.*]

Come, then: Our vision has triumphed.

THALASSA

[*Calling low.*]

Babbo!

PHAON

[*Pausing wildly, with instant revolution lapses to his slave's posture.*]

Ha! thou art tempting
Me to thy power again.

[*Going to Thalassa, who still is bowed, stricken, over the bodies.*]

Thalassa, come to me!

THALASSA

[*Lifts her craving face to his.*]

Give them
Back to me, Babbo.

PHAON

[*Starting.*]

Babbo! — Hark, they are calling it: "Babbo!"
"Father!" From yonder they call to me, lifting their little arms hither
Out of the dark of Hades. — Cease now, my Bion! I hear thee,
Yea, and will bring ye both home again.

[*Raising Thalassa to him.*]

Mother of them, thou my slave-mate,
Come with me! I — thou and I — shall draw them again to us — call their
Flitting ghosts back into flesh and blood — warm again in our arms. Come,
Come to the beach with me: far, far in the salty-weed caverns,
There will I give thee them back, and make reparation; there shalt thou
Bear to me children — alive, bright-eyed avengers of me, their
Father, — this murder. Thalassa, lift up yon little body,
And I will bear in my son unto the temple.

[*Lifting the dead boy in his arms, he goes with the slave-woman, who carries the infant child. At the door of the temple, where their eyes meet across the dead forms of their children, Phaon gives to her a yearning look of tenderness, and they enter the temple.*

From her place by the cliff whence she has watched without moving, Sappho calls with anguished appeal.]

SAPPHO

Thalassa!

[*The colours of sunrise begin now to flood the scene. Away on the left are heard the voices of men and maidens singing.*]

THE VOICES

Gath'rers, what have ye forgot,
Hymenæon!
Blushing ripe on the end of the bough?
Hymenæon!
Ripe now, but ye may not reach —
For the bride is won, and the groom is strong:
Kala, O Charíessa!

SAPPHO

[*Murmurs.*]

The epithalamium! — and so the end!

[*Slowly, with aspect of succumbed despair, Sappho moves toward the steps of Aphrodite's shrine. As she does so, the Priest of Poseidon comes from the temple to the first pillar and, raising there his trident toward the sunrise, stands awaiting the approaching singers, whose flutes and lyres sound nearer.*

Art thou then come once more, O Silent One?

[*Sinking at his feet.*]

God of the generations, pain, and death,
I bow to thee. — Not for love's sake is love's
Fierce happiness, but for the after-race.
Yet, thou eternal Watcher of the tides,
Knowing their passions, tell me! Why must we
Rapturous beings of the spray and storm
That, chanting, beat our hearts against thy shores
Of aspiration — ebb? ebb and return
Into the songless deep? Are we no more
Than foam upon thy garment? — flying spume
Caught on thy trident's horn, to flash the sun
An instant — and expire? Are we no more?
Reveal to me! Break once thine infinite
Vow of secretiveness, and whisper it
Soft. I will keep thy secret.

[*Rising.*]

Thou *wilt* not!
Thou wilt divulge it — never. Fare you well!

[*She rushes up the steps to the jutting shrine.*]

Another wave has broken at your feet
And, moaning, wanes into oblivion.
But not its radiance! That flashes back
Into the Morning, and shall flame again
Over a myriad waves. That flame am I,
Nor thou, Poseidon, shalt extinguish me.
My spirit is thy changeling, and returns
To her, who glows beyond the stars of birth —
To her, who is herself time's passion-star.

[*Turning to the edge of the rock, Sappho calls upward into the breaking mists, through which the full glory of morning ruddies her white robe with its splendour.*]

Beautiful Sister, goddess of desire,
Come to me! Clasp me in your wings of sunrise
Burning, for see! I go forth to you burning
Still. — Aphrodite!

[*She leaps into the fog and disappears.*

As she vanishes, there enters, through the colonnade, singing, the bridal procession of youths and girl-disciples, accompanying Atthis, who holds, smiling, the hand of a youth in gold armour. As these reach and pass the silent form of the Priest, the fog — increasing from the sea — rolls over the scene.]

VOICES OF THE SINGERS

Like the stars about the moon
Hymenæon!
When her orbèd smile she shows,
Hymenæon!
Lovers, yield to her your light;
She is single in the night.
Kala, O Charíessa!

[*With ever-increasing obscurity the fog closes down, until — as the last of the men and maidens pass into the veiled temple — the scene is involved in darkness entire, save where, beside his pillar, the brooding Priest of Poseidon is vaguely visible.*

Gradually, then, on the foggy texture of this obscurity, the outlines of another scene become apparent; and while the female voices within the temple die away, and the male

voices, blending, pass without cessation into a song of different melody in Italian, the Brooding Figure is itself obscured, and there stands now, beside the lava pillar of the excavation — the archæologist, Medbery. Simultaneously the dimness is pierced by the rays of approaching torches, and enter — through the right door of the Prologue-scene — the Neapolitan Labourers, singing.]

Tutt' altro ciel mi chiama,
Addio! Addio!
Ma questo cor ti brama,
È il cor, il cor ti lascerò!

Di bacie d' armonia
È l' aura tua ripiena,
O magica Sirena
Fedel, fedele a te sarò! . . .

Addio, O care memorie
Del tempo, ah! che fuggì!

[*Having placed their torches, and with their picks begun to strike the lava with muffled reverberation, one of the Labourers stoops and lifts, from the newly dug débris, a curved object, which he hands to the pensive archæologist. The others pause in their lazy digging, and look at him.*]

MEDBERY

[*Taking it in his hand.*]

A lyre of tortoise-shell! How long it has lain silent in the heart of Time! Ah, no — this was no dream. Here *Sappho* dreams — buried, but not dead.

Here we shall find her asleep in the arms of her lover — the Antique World: — And *I* shall awaken her! Labourers, to your work! Your picks are ready; the lava crumbles. *Scavate!* Dig — dig!

[*As the Labourers resume their labour and their song*]

THE MODERN CURTAIN FALLS.

APPENDIX

FIRST AND SECOND INTERLUDES

[PANTOMIME]

verum ita risores, ita commendare dicaces
conveniet Satyros, ita vertere seria ludo.

— HORACE: *De Arte Poetica.*

segnius inritant animos demissa per aurem
quam quæ sunt oculis subiecta fidelibus et quæ
ipse sibi tradit spectator.

— *Idem.*

FIRST AND SECOND INTERLUDES

CHARACTERS

PANTOMIMUS[1] — *announcing the Pantomime, "Hercules and the Sphinx," before the Herculaneum Audience.*

VARIUS,[1] HORACE,[1] VIRGIL,[1] MÆCENAS,[1] POLLIO,[1] as Mutes.

HERCULES, *the demigod*
SILENUS, *the satyr*
SERVUS, *a slave*
OMPHALE, *a Nymph (afterward disguised as the Sphinx)*

Masked Characters in the Pantomime: Mutes

BOY-MIMES, *as Fauns (afterward as Cupids)*
GIRL-MIMES, *as Nymphs (afterward as Psyches)*

Unmasked Characters in the Pantomime: Mutes and Lyrists

[1] Appears only in First Interlude.

FIRST INTERLUDE

PERFORMED BEFORE THE HERCULANEUM CURTAIN BETWEEN ACT I AND ACT II OF THE TRAGEDY.

FIRST INTERLUDE

No sooner has the curtain closed than from their hidden seats the Herculaneum audience burst into murmurous applause, mingled with the cries of "Vivat! Vale, Varius! Plaudite!" At this, Horace, Virgil, Varius, Mæcenas, and Pollio appear from their places [which, during the Act of the Tragedy, they have occupied in a row beyond sight] and take seats in the first row of marble chairs.

Here they are greeted again by the Herculaneum audience, whom Varius, rising, salutes, and is about to address when enters, through the door in the curtain, PANTOMIMUS, a parti-coloured figure, garbed antiquely as a harlequin, wreathed and masked.[1]

Perceiving his entrance, Varius makes a gesture to the audience indicative that he cannot then respond to their applause, and with that sits down to watch the ensuing action.

Behind Pantomimus, enter [on either side of him] two little Pantomimi, half his height, exactly resembling him in every particular. These, as with a skipping step and motion Pantomimus speaks his Introduction, imitate in dumb show his every movement of wand and gesture, and this with such simultaneousness, that they appear like his twin-images in miniature projected beside him.

[1] In one hand, Pantomimus carries a wand resembling a caduceus, but differing from that of Mercury in that the heads of the twining snakes are carved as little masks of comedy, and the tip of the wand, to which the flying wings are affixed, is the shining disk of a mirror, into which at times Pantomimus peers quaintly at his reflection.

Pantomimus makes his entrance with suddenness and, raising his caduceus for silence, speaks his first four lines from the top of the steps. Descending then to the centre of the orchestra space, he recites the remainder, with agile gestures, to the low, quick-thrummed accompaniment of a harpist [within the wings].

PANTOMIMUS

Salve,
Herculaneans!
Hush:
Pantomimus I!
Behold my palace:
Up that slit
Through the floor
I plucked it. — *Ecce!*
So you see
How thin a wall
Divides the wise
From the fools.
T'other side
Melpomene,
The tragic Muse,
Weaves the plot;
This side now
(Behind her back)
I pull her play
Wrong-side-out.
Thus in the seams
Shall we reversed
View the design,
And so discern
How the crease
In Grandeur's scowl
Is but a grin
Up-side-down.

Therefore, as critic
  Who would test
  Tragedy,
Between the curtains
I slip a mask on,
  Catch the Muse,
  Gag her mouth,
Skew up her eyebrows,
And thus ask pardon:
  "O Olympic
  Lady, if so
Grotesque a greeting
  Mar and tarnish
Your chaste complexion,
Then am I certain
  You're no sky-born
  Goddess, but merely
A painted drab.
So, lords, a masquerade I leave you:
  A hero, and
  A riddle and
  A heroine —
THE SPHINX AND HERCULES: the riddle
To find the tragic Muse. — Heaven help you!

[*Exit, with Pantomimi, within the curtain door.*]

Enter at left aisle and at right [*as in the Prelude*] the two Flutists, whose playing outside has accompanied the speech of Pantomimus. These, now visible, accompany the ensuing pantomime, with flute and harp. With these, enter two slaves [functionaries of the theatre] bearing two stage-properties, which they place on either side, near the wings: that of the right-hand one represents a squat pillar, on top of which is the sitting figure of a bronze Sphinx: that of the left-hand — a set-piece of foliage and shrubbery. Exeunt.

Enter then, at left, the first of the Pantomimists — *Servus*, a house-slave, masked as such. He places at the foot of the steps, centre, a low seat and, beside it, a heap of wool and spinning materials. There he prostrates himself toward the left entrance, as enter there — dancing to harp music — a group of young girl-mimes [without masks], dressed as *Nymphs* and carrying distaffs.

In the midst of these — preceded by most of them — enter *Hercules*, in grotesque mask, which depicts a comic-dejected expression. He is wadded after the manner of the comic histrionic vase-figures of antiquity, and walks downcast. Instead of his legendary lion's skin, there hangs from his shoulder the woolly pelt of a sheep; in place of his knotted club, his hand holds a huge distaff; and for the rest he is dressed like a Greek woman.

He is accompanied by *Omphale*, masked as a beautiful and amorous nymph. Over her shoulders she wears his lion's skin; in one hand she holds his massive club; with the other she caresses him.

With coquetting wiles, the Nymphs in their dancing draw the two toward the centre, where they sit beside the wool — Hercules, with heavy sighs, beginning to spin, while Omphale, posing in the lion's skin, approves his labour. Here the Nymphs, reclined about them on the steps and the ground, execute a rhythmic dance with their arms and distaffs, singing to their movement: —

Angustam amice pauperiem pati
robustus acri militia puer
condiscat et Parthos feroces
vexet eques metuendus hasta
vitamque sub divo et trepidis agat
in rebus. illum ex mœnibus hosticis
matrona bellantis tyranni
prospiciens et adulta virgo
suspiret, eheu, ne rudis agminum
sponsus lacessat regius asperum
tactu leonem, quem cruenta
per medias rapit ira cædes.[1]

At the culmination of this, Hercules, who has been repelling the attentions of Omphale, at first with feeble ennui, but afterwards with increasing determination, now rises in grandiose disgust, and — snatching from her his lion's skin and club — repudiates her and the Nymphs.

Flinging down the sheep's pelt and setting his foot upon it, he breaks his distaff in pieces and, threatening Omphale, drives the Nymphs off the scene, left. [During this excitement, Servus — who has been standing aside — seizes the heap of wool, and exit with it in flight.] Turning then to the image of the *Sphinx*, Hercules expresses in dumb show how, lured by the riddle of the Sphinx, he aspires to fight and conquer the world for her sake. Laying his club and lion's skin devoutly at the foot of the column, he

[1] Horace: Ode II of Book III.

The literal translation (by A. H. Bryce) is as follows: —

"Let youth, made strong by active war, learn to endure privation in a happy mood; let him as horseman bold with dreaded spear harass the daring Mede, and spend his life in open air, and midst alarms of foes. Let wife and daughter of the warring king, as from the hostile walls they look, heave many a sigh, alas! lest princely spouse, untried in war, provoke the lion, dangerous to stir, whom bloodthirsty anger hurries on through thickest of the fight."

kneels, embraces it, and raises then his arms in supplication to the Sphinx.

Thus kneeling, he is watched furtively at a distance by Omphale, who, at his outburst, has run to the edge of the foliage, right. Hercules, rising, puts on his lion's skin, and brandishing his club heroicly for the benefit of the immovable Sphinx, goes off, left.

Immediately Omphale seizes from among the foliage a sylvan pipe, and blows on it a brief, appealing ditty. At this, from behind the foliage, run out boy-mimes, in the guise of Fauns; she gesticulates to them beseechingly. They run back and presently return, dancing to pipe-music, accompanying and leading a goat, astride of which sits *Silenus*, an old grotesque Satyr, in mask.

Omphale greets him joyfully and helps him down from the goat. She then describes to him in pantomime the late outburst of Hercules — his breaking the spindle, his enamoration for the Sphinx, etc., and prays his aid and advice.

Silenus pauses an instant in philosophical absorption, then gives a leap and skip. Omphale, seeing that he has hit on some plan, expresses her pleasure and inquires what his plan may be. Silenus bids her call a slave. Omphale claps her hands toward the left entrance. Servus enters. Silenus signs to him. Servus goes back and returns immediately, rolling in a wine-cask, from which he fills an antique beaker. From this Silenus sips and approves. He then points to the Sphinx and asks if it be that of which Hercules is enamoured. Omphale assents. Silenus then directs Servus to lift the Sphinx down from the pillar. Servus does so, revealing its hollow interior as he carries it. Silenus, drawing Omphale's attention to this fact of its hollowness, opens the door in the curtain, and commands Servus to bear the Sphinx within. Servus does so. Silenus, then, pointing to the window above

the door, whispers in the ear of Omphale, who, delighted, enters the door after Servus. Silenus closes the door as Hercules reënters, left.

The hero has discarded his woman's garb, and comes forward now dressed as a man, with lion's skin and club—his mask changed to one of an exultant and martial expression.

Silenus greets him with obsequious and cunning servility and offers him wine. Hercules, with good-natured hauteur, condescends to accept the cup which he offers. While he is drinking, the window above in the curtain opens, and Omphale thrusts her head out, revealing [within] beside her own, the Sphinx's head. Silenus secretively motions her to be cautious. Seeing his gesture, Hercules looks up, but not swiftly enough to detect Omphale, who withdraws. Again looking forth, as he turns to drink again, Omphale mocks Hercules below, dropping wisps of wool on his head, the source of which, however, Hercules fails to detect. Silenus explains that the wool is really feathers, which fell from a bird flying overhead.

Hercules now, under the sly persuasions of the old Satyr, grows more pleased with the wine, drinks finally from the spigot of the cask, and becomes drunk—as he becomes so, expressing to Silenus, with increasing familiarity and descriptive force, all the mighty exploits he intends to accomplish in the service of the incomparable Sphinx, whose living prototype he declares he will immediately set forth in search of.

Starting now, humorously drunk, to depart [right] he is detained by Silenus, who points upward to the window, where now the blank, immovable face of the Sphinx looks forth at the sky. Hercules, bewildered, asks Silenus if it is really the Sphinx herself and alive? Silenus assents and proves his assertion by pointing to the deserted pedestal. At this, Hercules

addresses the Sphinx, with impassioned gestures. The Sphinx remains immovable. Hercules becomes discouraged. Silenus then puts a pipe in his hand, and tells him to play it. He does so, and is rewarded by a slow, preternatural look from the Sphinx. At this he plays more vociferously and, surrounded by the little piping Fauns, performs a serenade beneath the casement, while Silenus, looking on from a distance, rubs his hands with sly delight.

The serenade ends by Hercules, on his knees, imploring the Sphinx to come down. The Sphinx at length consents and the casement closes. Silenus calls his Fauns away to the edge of the foliage, and Hercules goes to the door.

For a moment nothing happens and Hercules knocks on the steps impatiently with his club. Then the door opens and enter the Sphinx — dressed below in the Greek garments of Omphale, but from the waist upward consisting of the sitting image of the Sphinx, beneath whose closed wings the arms of Omphale are thrust through and have place for motion.

The Sphinx, its tail swinging behind, descends the steps, reticent and impassive, attended by Hercules, drunk and enamoured.

Then at the foot of the steps, to the accompaniment from the foliage of the piping Fauns, who play softly a variation of the serenade theme, Hercules woos the Sphinx, who, at the proper moment, succumbs to his entreaties. After embracing him amorously, she extends her hand to him. He seizes it to kiss; she withdraws it and signifies that he must put a ring on the ring-finger. Hercules hunts about him in vain for a ring. Calling then Silenus and the Fauns, he explains to them the situation.

Silenus declares that there will be no difficulty; his Fauns will forge him a ring with which to wed the

Sphinx. At this joyful information, Hercules, the Sphinx, and Silenus express their feelings in a dance[1] with the Fauns, at the climax of which the Fauns escort the three masked characters to the door in the curtain, through which they pass and disappear, while the Fauns, dividing into two groups, dance off and exeunt at either side. Simultaneously the two theatre slaves remove the stage properties.

Varius, Mæcenas, and Pollio, rising now in laughter, pass again to places beyond sight in the Herculaneum audience, followed thither by Horace and Virgil, talking together.

The theatre slaves then pass silently across and the lights shine dimmer. After a pause, the Herculaneum curtain is lowered, discovering again Lesbos — the scene of the Tragedy.

Explicit Interludium Primum

[1] Before the commencement of this dance, Servus has entered and removed the low seat and wine-cask.

SECOND INTERLUDE

PERFORMED BEFORE THE HERCULANEUM CURTAIN BETWEEN ACT II AND ACT III OF THE TRAGEDY.

SECOND INTERLUDE[1]

THE theatre of Varius remains in dimness, and its audience in silence. A shaft of pale light falls upon the altar [centre], out of the top of which [where before was the tripod] are seen to be growing lilies, harebells and vari-coloured wild flowers.

At the same time, an elfin dance-music is heard off scene, and enter [left] to the sound of harps, the girl-mimes in guise of *Psyches*, with little wings. In-and-out of the shadows of the shaft of moonlight, these trip a light-footed dance, the motif of which is the finding and plucking of flowers. At times they run, at times they stoop, at times they pause and weave. Toward the end of their dance, they espy the growing lilies on the altar and, encircling it, pluck away the flowers till the marble is bare. Weaving these into ropes, they dance off the scene, right.

These have already gone when enter [left] the boy-mimes, guised as *Cupids*, the one-half carrying long golden sledge-hammers, the other half holding tongs and great pincers made of gold. As they enter, there rises out of the top of the altar an anvil, glowing red-hot, upon which gleams a great gold ring. Coming forward, as before the Psyches danced their measures simulative of the plucking of flowers, so now the Cupids carrying their gleaming sledge-hammers and tongs — their wrists and ankles fastened with golden cymbals — execute a dance, the

[1] This Interlude, like the First, occupies approximately the time of a usual entr'acte.

motif of which is the hammering and forging of rings upon viewless anvils — at the strokes of their play-labour clashing their cymbals together to the music of flutes and strings. Similarly toward the end of their dance, having discovered the anvil glowing upon the altar, they encircle it, and half of them seizing the great ring with their pincers, the other half ply upon it their golden hammers, in rhythm with the music.

Finally their leader, lifting the ring with his tongs, bears it away [left] and is followed off the scene by the others, dancing.

At this moment the door in the curtain opens, and enter Silenus in the vestments of a priest, followed by Hercules and the Sphinx fantastically garlanded as bridegroom and bride, — their steps lighted by Servus, whose torch illuminates the scene.

Silenus leads the way down the steps straight to the altar, coming round to the other side of which he turns his back and faces Hercules and the Sphinx, who stand facing him on the other side. At the same time reënter, from right and left, the leaders of the girl-mimes and boy-mimes, who — at either side of the altar — proffer to Silenus respectively a rope of flowers and a small gold ring. Laying the flowers on the altar, Silenus bestows his benediction upon Hercules and the Sphinx, to the former of whom he extends the ring. Hercules takes it and as the Sphinx extends her left hand, he slips upon her ring-finger the gold ring.

Instantly a clash of cymbals is heard from the left, and a clapping of palms from the right, and reënter — dancing — the Cupids and Psyches, who encircle the scene just as Servus removes from the bride the great mask of the Sphinx, thereby revealing her to the astounded Hercules — as Omphale, who embraces him, exulting in her ring.

With gestures of comic resignation, Hercules at the side of Omphale follows Silenus, accompanied by the Cupids and Psyches in procession, to the door in the curtain, wherein all pass and disappear to the jubilant cymbal-clashings of the Cupids and the flower-rope-wreathings of the Psyches. The door closes, the music sounds more faintly and dies away.

For a moment all is blackness and silence; then the Herculaneum curtain, descending, reveals again the temple in Lesbos.

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A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Mr. Percy MacKaye is of interesting descent on both sides. His paternal greatgrandfather came to this country from the Scottish Highlands about 1800. His grandfather, Colonel James Morrison MacKaye, a staunch adherent of anti-slavery doctrines, was an intimate friend of Clay, Webster, Garrison, Lincoln, and other leaders of the time. During the Civil War, he was one of three commissioners appointed by Lincoln to personally investigate the condition of the negro in the South; and his official report thereon was an important influence among those which determined the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

His father, James Steele MacKaye was a man of various talent and versatility. Beginning as a painter, a pupil of Hunt, Inness and Gerôme, but losing his studio and paintings in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, he became an ardent disciple of François Delsarte, and introduced his principles to America. Thus indirectly he was led to make a profession of the drama: as author of many successful plays, the best remembered probably being "Hazel Kirke" and "Paul Kauvar;" as actor in his own plays and in "Hamlet" and other plays of Shakespeare; and as theater founder and manager at the old Lyceum and at the Madison Square in New York. His activity carried him also into various other pursuits, in which he was inventor, artist, and man of affairs.

On his mother's side, Percy MacKaye is of New England Puritan descent, his ancestors having come to Massachusetts in 1632. His maternal grandmother was President of one of the earliest women's colleges in New England. His mother, *née* Mary Medbery, was born in Newburyport, Mass. Her intellectual activity, which must have exerted a strong influence on her son, has recently been shown by a charming dramatization of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," lately published.

Percy MacKaye was born in New York City, March 16th, 1875. The winters of his boyhood were spent in or about New York and—as he grew old enough—in the

frequent companionship of his father in the theater, especially during the production of "Paul Kauvar" at the old Standard Theater. He was also initiated in the knowledge of "behind the scenes" by his older brother, William Payson MacKaye, an actor and an artist of great promise, who died near the beginning of his career. His summers — and a few winters — were passed in rural New England, chiefly at Shirley, Mass., which he has always considered as home. In 1892-93, he made his first essay in the genre of poetic drama, by writing a series of choral songs for his father's vast musical drama "Columbus," to have been performed in his Spectatorium, planned, and nearly completed, for the World's Fair. Anton Seidl, who had been engaged to conduct the music, said of this enterprise: "In the art of poetic spectacle, this project as far exceeds Baireuth, as Baireuth exceeded the drama of Wagner's predecessors." Owing to an unforseen panic in Wall Street, however, the Spectatorium was never completed, and soon after—as a result of incessant overwork—Steele MacKaye died (Feb. 25th, 1894) at the age of 52.

At Harvard College his son Percy studied the usual four years, taking his A. B. in 1897. During his Junior year, he wrote a poetical play, acted by Harvard and Wellesley students, entitled "Sappho," dealing with the Greek poetess as heroine, but bearing no other resemblance to his latest work. At graduation he was one of the speakers, his commencement part being entitled: "The Need of Imagination in the Drama of Today." A year after graduation, he was married to Miss Marion Homer Morse, of Cambridge, Mass., and went abroad, spending two years in Italy, Switzerland, Germany and England. In Italy he and his wife lived in a villa on the Aldobrandini estate at Frascati, near Rome, where he wrote a poetical play entitled, "A Garland to Sylvia." Going to Leipzig, he matriculated at the University, where he studied Germanics, and wrote a play on the subject of the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf. A later result of this study was his play "Fenris the Wolf," published in 1905.

Returning in 1900 to New York, he taught there in a private school for boys for four years. During this period, Mr. E. H. Sothern became interested in his dramatic work, and commissioned him to write "The Canterbury Pilgrims," as yet unacted, but published in 1903. In 1904, he joined the colony of artists and writers at Cornish, N. H., where he has his permanent home. There he has devoted himself entirely to literary and dramatic work.

His third published poetic drama was "Jeanne d'Arc," 1906: and his fourth "Sappho and Phaon," 1907. He has also written a prose version of part of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," and a prose drama, "The Scarecrow," based on Nathaniel's Hawthorne's sketch "Feathertop." Besides these he has written a considerable amount of verse and prose, including a lecture on "American Drama: Some Aspects and Potentialities," delivered in Chicago, 1906; "Ninety-Seven," a poem read at the decennial reunion of his Harvard Class (published in the New York *Post* June 29, 1907), and the Prologue to the Outdoor Masque given at the remarkable celebration, in 1905, of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Cornish colony by Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

The first of his plays to be acted on the public stage was "Jeanne d'Arc," produced by Mr. E. H. Sothern and Miss Julia Marlowe at the Lyric Theater, Philadelphia, October 15, 1906 (with a musical *suite* by Prof. F. S. Converse of Harvard), and since then performed by them at Chicago, New York, Boston, London, and elsewhere. Its success from every point of view has been great, and bodes well for the future not only of Mr. MacKaye as a dramatist, but of the whole American drama as well.

"Sappho and Phaon" was produced, by Mr. Harrison Grey Fiske, October 21st, 1907, at the Lyric Theater, New York, with Madame Bertha Kalich in the title rôle.

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Thalassa, slave-woman, his mate, he has two children, one of whom is ill. The father intends to sacrifice a dove to Poseidon, to appease the god's anger, so the babe may recover. Sappho persuades him to give her the dove, for the service of Aphrodite. The human element enters with Thalassa, symbolical of the spirit of maternity, of devotion to helpless bairns, singer of the crooning cradle-songs of the world. Henceforth Phaon is torn between the passionate dream of this resplendent poetess, who seems to him as one of the gods, and the saner love of the mother of his children, of her who shared uncomplainingly with him his dull, dank sea-cave."

In this elemental conflict, Poseidon, the angered "god of the generations, pain and death," defeats Aphrodite; and Phaon, stricken once more a slave, bows over the body of his little dead son, while Sappho, uttering an ultimate defiance of destiny, leaps from the temple-cliff into the sea.

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> "Free me, Freyja! Frore am I, frost-bit;
> Go we together into greenwood glad!
> Mirk under moon-mist mad, will meet thee,
> Hunt thee from hiding, thy heart-beats hear.

"Fenris is the only character who speaks in Scandinavian metre. The others all use blank verse of a nervous, sometimes a little too nervous, quality. It is, nevertheless, a poetic venture of a sincerity and magnitude for which there can be nothing but admiration."

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